Just mentioning El Chavo del Ocho is enough to put people in a good mood. This character's humor has made the world laugh for 35 years, but it has also made people think;

The neighborhood where he lives has also been a place for sarcasm, naivety, social commentary, nostalgia, wit, and irony. And that is why there isn't a single paragraph in this book that doesn't contain something interesting; for example: "animals that eat meat are called carnivores; animals that eat fruit are called frugivores; animals that eat everything are called rich," "the teacher said that the first people to use horses were the Chinese, but Chilindrina says no, that mares used them first," "and there was also a president named Porfirio Díaz, who was the one the Mexicans put up with the longest," and so on.

In addition, this edition is illustrated with drawings by Roberto Gómez Bolaños himself.

El Diario de El Chavo del Ocho

"The Diary of El Chavo del Ocho"

Written by Roberto Gómez Bolaños

EL DIARIO DE EL CHAVO DEL OCHO
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Foreword

by Roberto Gómez Bolaños

His baggy pants had more patches and mends than original fabric.They were precariously held up by two strips of cloth serving as suspenders, draped over an old, faded T-shirt that was also covered in patches and mends. He was wearing a pair of shoes of the so-called “miner” type that had clearly belonged to an adult. But the most distinctive feature of his outfit was the old cap with earflaps, which must have been quite useful to him in cold weather, but which, when I met him in the middle of summer, only served to accentuate the grotesque nature of his appearance.

"Do you need a polish, boss?" he had asked me, pointing to the small drawer in the shoe-shining stand. I was about to say no, since my shoes were in pretty good shape, but then I had a hunch—that feeling that drives us to make decisions without any apparent reason. So I said yes.

I was sitting on one of those beautiful wrought-iron benches that can still be found in some of the city's parks. He settled into the portable stool that was part of his work equipment and began his task with unusual enthusiasm. Then I watched him more closely, and instantly I understood what had been the reason for my hunch: that child was the very embodiment of tenderness. I had a hard time striking up a conversation with him, as it was obvious that my questions aroused the natural wariness of someone who is used to receiving very little—almost nothing, I would say—from others.

"What's your name?" I asked him.

"Well, it doesn't matter, does it?"

"……? What doesn't matter?"

"Call me whatever you want. Everyone calls me 'El Chavo del Ocho' anyway."

"How old are you?" I asked again.

"My age is the number of years I've lived."

"So, how old are you?"

"Eight, I think…"

"Where were you born?"

"I can't remember because I was very young when I was born."

So I let there be a pause, hoping he would be the one to pick up the conversation again, but it was clear that his shyness was preventing him from doing so. Therefore, I stopped asking questions as well.

I gave him a generous tip when he finished polishing my shoes. That brought a sparkle to his eyes that had been missing before, and he started dancing around while exclaiming:

"With this, I can buy a torta de jamón… or two… or three…!" And then, uttering a quick and enthusiastic *"thank you,"* he nimbly picked up his work gear and dashed out into the street, where he began weaving through the heavy traffic with the skill that only poor children in crowded cities possess. Then, just as he disappeared from view, I could still hear those words that seemed magical:

"Torta de jamón!"

That's when I discovered the notebook.

I had left it next to the park bench where I was sitting. And it was easy to assume it belonged to Chavo del Ocho, since its pitiful condition matched that of its owner. It was a plain notebook that clearly showed the constant use it had been subjected to. All that remained of the cardboard covers were small, irregular pieces stained with grease, dust, sweat, and who knows what else! The pages, some of them also incomplete, were curled at the edges and bore an equally large number of stains of the most varied origins; but they contained the most spontaneous manuscript my eyes have ever seen: "The Diary of Chavo del Ocho".

The first time I read it, I felt the remorse of someone who knows they are invading a person's privacy. But when I read it a second time, that feeling gradually turned into unease, which then gave way to laughter, sadness, and wonder. Then I became convinced that it was necessary to give the public the opportunity to discover that strangely optimistic world in which a child who lacks everything—except for that which remains the driving force of the universe: faith—can thrive.

NOTE: As is to be expected, the manuscript contains countless grammatical and syntactic errors, among others. For this reason, I have felt compelled to make corrections, while striving, as much as possible, to preserve the original's flavor. Sometimes, for example, I had to flesh out a sentence that was only vaguely suggested, and on rare occasions I had to add or delete phrases and words. I also had to rearrange some paragraphs; however, I did not alter the apparent disorder in which Chavo's events or observations are narrated.

The Diary

by El Chavo del Ocho

EL CHAVO

Entry 1

I used to think I'd never had a dad. But then my friends explained to me that wasn't possible; that everyone is born because their dad slept with their mom. What happened was that I never met my dad. So he just slept with her and left.

I did get to know my mom, but only a little. Since she had to work, she took me every day to a place called daycare, and that's where I stayed until she came back to pick me up. The bad part was that the poor woman would come home exhausted from working so hard, and when she said she was there to pick up her son, they'd ask her:

"Which one is it?"

and she would reply, *"I don't know, one of those"*

And then they'd hand her the child closest at hand, and of course they didn't always give her the same child. So chances are I'm not really me. One day, my mom didn't come to pick me up.

And she didn't come the other days either.

Despite everything, I really would like to have a mom. There are so, so many of them, I don't know why I didn't get one, even if she wasn't the best. Of course, there are lots of moms who have several kids, but there are others who only have one, like Doña Florinda. So Quico has a whole mom all to himself. And that silly boy misbehaves and disobeys her! And I tell Quico not to be silly, not to take her for granted.

I'd like to have a dad, too, but not someone like Ron Damon, who is Chilindrina's dad, because Ron Damon really hits.

Well, Doña Florinda hits people a lot too, but not her son… she only hits Ron Damón.

Ron Damón is really mean. And they say kids turn out just like their parents, but that's not true because La Chilindrina isn't mean. Where she is just like her dad is in being lazy; that's why she doesn't like school.

I'd also like to have an aunt. Or a dog.

Or something…

I remember that a long time ago, they took me to live in a house that was an orphanage where all the children were orphans.

The head caretaker was Sra. Martina, who was always in a bad mood and hit all the children. Once she made my nose bleed, and then she got angry because I stained my clothes with blood, and afterward she punished me by not letting me eat for a day. Since then, I've been very careful to prevent my nose from bleeding again, and the only time I failed was one day when I tripped and fell onto a step-like structure that was there. But Sra. Martina never found out because I quickly ran to the laundry area and washed my clothes. The only downside was that I had to put my clothes back on while they were still wet. Then she asked me why my clothes were wet, and I told her it had rained on me. But she told me I was a liar, because it hadn't rained in two months.

And she punished me by not letting me eat for another day.

At the orphanage, there was a boy older than me named Chente, and he was my best friend.

The problem with Chente was that he was always sick.

And that's how it was until he died.

Sometimes some ladies would come to the orphanage to look at the children. Then they'd pick the one they liked best and take him home to live with them. And I really wanted them to pick me, but they always chose the prettiest ones; so I never left.

Because I was so ugly that when we played hide-and-seek, the other kids would rather lose than find me.

Then, as time went by and Sra. Martina became more and more difficult to deal with, I thought the best thing to do would be to run away from the orphanage. But I could never figure out how to do it. This was because I was a fool and therefore lacked the imagination to come up with good ideas.

So I had two reasons to feel sad: first, not being able to get away; and second, realizing how foolish I was.

And one day I got so sad that I burst into tears; and when Sra. Martina asked me why I was crying, I had no choice but to confess to her that I wanted to run away from there. Then she said:

"You should have said so sooner,"

she said, and opened the door for me.

I walked down many streets I didn't know. They weren't very pretty streets, like the ones you see in TV movies; but they weren't very ugly either, like some of the others you also see on TV. But the worst part of all was how hungry I was. Because in this life, the most important thing is eating.

That's why I went into the market, where there were so many things to eat. The problem was that I didn't have any money to buy them. So I thought about doing something, but then I remembered that it's a sin to steal things—especially when they belong to someone else.

So what I did was ask for a gift, and a lady gave me two carrots. But the best part was the next day, when a man gave me a torta de jamón. There couldn't be anything better in this life!

There was another man who was also very kind and let me sleep in the cars he watched over at night. In exchange for this, all I had to do was carry buckets of water so he could wash the cars. But the man was so kind that he not only invited me to sleep in the cars, but sometimes he also invited some young women; and he would even stay up to keep them company.

One day I walked into an alley that was very dark, and I started to feel scared. So I started walking faster, but all I managed to do was end up in another alley that was even darker than the first one, and I got even more scared. I kept running until I came out into an area where there was a little light. It was a sort of open space littered with trash and debris. There were also dogs rummaging through the trash.

And there were kids, too. There were about eight or nine of them. Almost all of them were older than me, except for two who were younger—or maybe not. The oldest of them all was Mochilas.

Later they explained to me that they called him that because his hand had been cut off a long time ago. In other words, they had cut it off after it became severely infected. But he still had his other hand, with which he could hit harder than any of his companions. And that's why everyone else obeyed him.

When I approached them, the first thing that caught my attention was that one of the boys was painting his face. This boy was Pinacate, and he knew how to juggle three small balls in the air without dropping a single one. He told me he did this at a nearby corner where there's a traffic light that stays red for a long time, causing cars to stop for quite a while. So he and another boy would juggle the balls to get tips. The other boy was named Conejo, but he didn't know how to juggle. What Conejo did was get down on all fours so Pinacate could climb on top of him, since that made it easier for drivers to see Pinacate when he was juggling the balls.

I wanted to ask more questions, but then Mochilas told Pinacate to hurry up and finish painting his face. Pinacate did as he was told, and a little while later he left with Conejo. In other words, they were heading to the corner where the traffic light stayed red for a long time.

The other kids hardly said a word, and they didn't even ask me who I was or where I came from. Some just stared at me, while others said things I didn't understand. And I don't know why, but I started to get even more scared. After a while, Mochilas started smoking and then passed the cigarette to the boy next to him. He just took a puff and passed it to the next one. And the others did the same, until the cigarette came to me. So I took a puff too, but I coughed a lot.

Some people started laughing at me, while others looked at me as if they wanted to ask me something. But they didn't ask me anything; all they did was take the cigarette away from me.

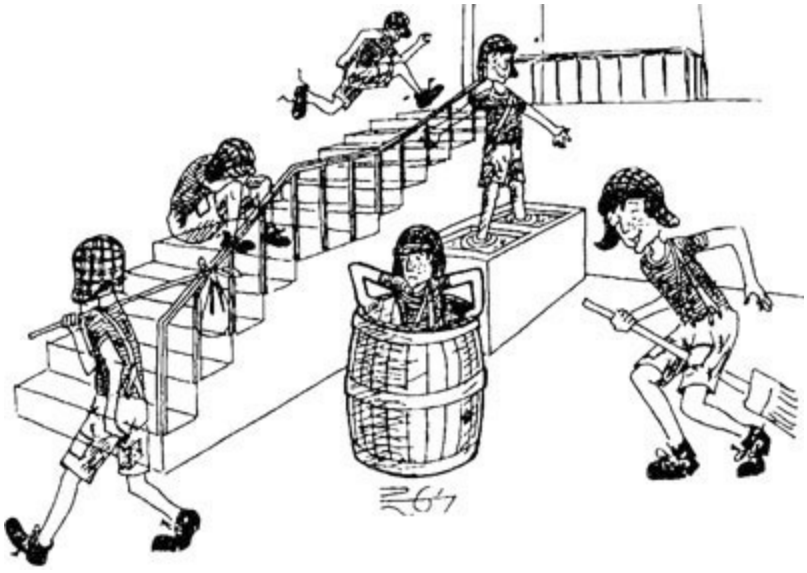
They also had a plastic bag, which had something inside it; something that smelled like the kind of smell you get in car paint shops. But I didn’t have much time to smell it, because just then Pinacate came running up, saying that Conjelo had kicked the bucket. In other words, he was saying that Conjelo was dead, and then everyone ran off.

I was the last one to arrive, but I also caught a glimpse of Conjelo lying there on the pavement, motionless and covered in blood. But I didn't want to get too close, because I started to feel really weird. I mean, it was like I wanted to throw up. But what was I going to throw up, if I hadn't eaten anything?

Pinacate didn't get very close to him either. Maybe because he didn't want the others to notice that he was crying. Although it wasn't very noticeable, because the tears looked as if they were part of the paint on his face.

Then I really felt like running away. And that's exactly what I did: I ran and ran without stopping for a second.

I never saw all those children again. Or rather, I have seen them again, but only in my dreams. And when that happens, I always wake up gasping for breath, as if I were freezing.



One day I was walking down a street I didn't know when it started raining heavily. So I ducked into an apartment building. And I've lived there ever since.

At first, I stayed at apartment number 8, where a very elderly woman lived; she told me that I reminded her of a grandson she had once had.

This little old lady in her 80s had such shaky hands that she couldn't do much of anything. That's why I helped her. But she always said:

“God will have to work a miracle so that my hands will stop shaking someday”.

Until one day I came home and realized that her hands weren't shaking anymore; and she was lying there all still, completely still.

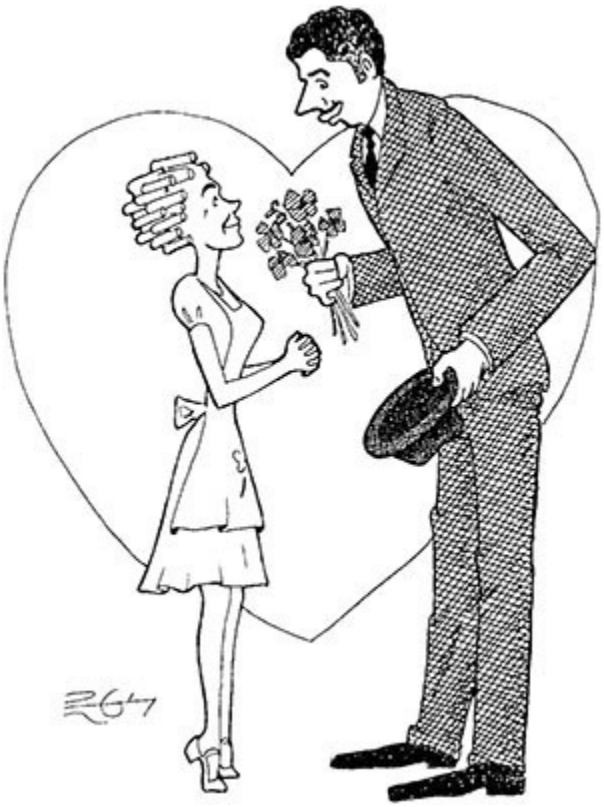
I think they buried her the next day.

But shortly after that, someone else moved into apartment number 8, so I had to leave. However, since I already had a lot of friends in the neighborhood, one day they’d invite me to sleep over at one house, and the next day at another. And that’s how it’s been ever since. Because it’s not true that I live inside a barrel, as some people have said.

The thing is, I crawl into the barrel when I don’t want others to notice that I’m crying. And also when I don’t feel like seeing other people. Or when I have a lot on my mind.

In any case, people had already gotten used to calling me El Chavo del Ocho, and that's what everyone still calls me.

Entry 2



La Chilindrina says that Professor Jirafales is in love with Doña Florinda, and that's why, whenever he's in front of her, his eyes go all glazed over.

And she says that Doña Florinda is also in love with Professor Jirafales. You can really tell, because she laughs like an idiot every time the professor comes to the neighborhood—which happens almost every day.

Doña Florinda always greets him with the same words:

“Professor Jirafales!”

—and the professor always replies in exactly the same way:

“Doña Florinda!”

“What a surprise to see you here!” she says.

“I came to bring you this humble gift,” he says, handing her a bouquet of flowers that also seems to be the same one every time.

“They’re beautiful,” she says. *“Would you like to come in for a cup of coffee?”*

“Would that be too much trouble?”

“Not at all, please come in.”

“After you.”

Then the two of them go into Doña Florinda’s house.

But no one knows what they’re doing in there.

DOÑA FLORINDA

Entry 3

Quico is an orphan, too. But not as much as I am, because he does have a mother—Doña Florinda—and the only thing he's missing is a father.

According to Doña Florinda, what happened was that her husband died just as Quico was starting to say his first words, or as Chilindrina puts it:

"—Back when Quico was just starting to spout his first nonsense".

At that time, Quico's father worked as a sailor on a ship, but Doña Florinda says that Don Federico—which was Quico's father's name—wasn't just a sailor, but also the ship's captain; and that, as a result, they had had more money than Mr. Barriga himself.

Then Ñoño said that couldn't be true, since his dad owns the whole neighborhood. But Doña Florinda said it was true, that they had once been very rich; and that what happened was that after she became a widow, she couldn’t find good jobs, and so she gradually had less and less money. So now she has no choice but to live among the riffraff—which is Chilindrina, me, and all the rest of us.

Some time later, we realized that perhaps what Doña Florinda had said was true after all, because one day she showed us a photograph of Don Federico, and there we could see that he was indeed wearing a very nice white uniform. But the uniform was the only nice thing about him—the man himself was hideous. I swear he looked just like Quico! I mean, the same butt-shaped face, only with a mustache. But with the same lukewarm-egg eyes and the same skinny-pig cheeks.

The saddest part was when we found out how Quico's dad died—his boat sank at sea, and he either drowned or was eaten by a shark.

QUICO

Entry 3

At school, the teacher scolded me for calling him “Maestro Longaniza” instead of “Professor Jirafales.” But what happened was that I just blurted it out—everyone went quiet when I said it. So it was kind of an accident, but I meant to do it.

And anyway, he didn't let me go out for recess. They just don't have any patience with me. But then, when it was time to leave, we all started recalling the different nicknames we've given Professor Jirafales, and we even made a list, which is as follows:

El Maestro Longaniza (The Sausage Master.).

El Ferrocarril Parado (The Stationary Train).

El Tobogán de Saltillo (The Saltillo Slide). (Because he was born in Saltillo, they say).

La Riata de Jaripeo (The Lasso).

El Tubo de Cañería (The Pipe).

El Palo Ensebado (The Greased Pole).

La Garrocha con Patas (The Stick with Legs).

El Intestino Desenrollado (The Unrolled Intestine).

El Poste de Teléfono (The Telephone Pole).

El Espaghetti Crudo (Raw Spaghetti).

El Semáforo en Rojo (The Red Light). (Because he was as tall as a red traffic light).

La Columna de la Independencia (The Independence Column).

And others we couldn't remember. But the best of them all is still Maestro Longaniza.

PROFESSOR JIRAFALES

Entry 5

Sr. Barriga is the richest man in the world, since he owns the whole neighborhood. That means everyone who lives there has to pay him rent every month. Well, everyone except Ron Damon, who never pays. And the same goes for Jaimito the Mailman. But I think the rest of them do pay. That's why Sr. Barriga has so much money—enough to buy all the food he wants. And that's also why he's the fattest man in the world.

By the way, Professor Jirafales once explained to us that the word “epidemic” means that a lot of people are sick with the same illness.

In other words, the illness is widespread and affects a lot of people. That's why I think that when Sr. Barriga gets an upset stomach, it's as if a whole epidemic were happening just to him.

Very soon, Sr. Barriga will have to settle for being the second-fattest man in the world. The one who's going to take the title from him is his son Ñoño, who spends his life stuffing his face. The other day, Ñoño brought three tortas de jamón to school, and he wouldn't share even a single bite with me. That's why I had to give him a real piece of my mind. The problem was that Ñoño ratted me out to his dad, and his dad ratted me out to Professor Jirafales. Then Professor Jirafales told me that what I'd done was really bad, which isn't true, because I handled it perfectly, and if you don't believe me, just ask Godínez. Anyway, the professor punished me by taking away my recess.

But Professor Jirafales spent the whole time talking to me and didn't go out for recess either. So he punished himself, because he realized he deserved a punishment too for having punished me.

When he was talking to me during recess, Professor Jirafales told me that good kids never hit others. So that means I'm a bad kid. Sometimes I feel like being a good kid, but then Ñoño shows up and ruins everything. Because he brings snacks and doesn't share any with me. So I get really mad and I have no choice but to hit him. Another reason I can't be a good boy is Quico, because he has a lot of toys and won't let me play with them. So I have to give him a hard time, too.

On the other hand, the one person I never hit is Godínez. Because Godínez hits back even harder. Well, there was one time I got really mad at Godínez, and we got into a good old-fashioned fistfight. I ended up with a bloody nose, but Godínez didn't get off scot-free, because I splattered him with blood.

And there have been plenty of times when I've felt like hitting Chilindrina, but you should never hit a woman—no matter how much she deserves it—and that's why they take such advantage of you, because they're the ones who can hit men. Which is really infuriating. And if you don't believe me, just ask Ron Damón, who always has to put up with the blows Doña Florinda deals him.

By the way, Ron Damón once told me he wished Doña Florinda had been a man so he could have talked back to her; but I told him that wouldn't have been in his best interest, because if Doña Florinda can give him such a hard time as a woman, as a man she would have sent him straight to the grave.

SEÑOR BARRIGA

Entry 6

At school, we studied animals.

The difference between animals and objects is that animals are living beings—unless they are already dead. And the difference between animals and plants is that animals don't stay in one place; instead, they move around by walking, swimming, or flying. As for plants, on the other hand, the only parts that “walk” are the soles of their

feet. There are also many differences between different animals. For example, some hatch from an egg, while others are born from their mothers. Animals that are born from their mothers are called mammals—because if they were born from their fathers, they would be called papivores. And the ones that hatch from the egg are called chicks.

We must never forget that animals are very useful to us, since some animals are used for work and others are raised for people to eat.

And of all animals, the cow is the most useful, because not only is it edible, but it also gives us its milk. Well, that's what they say, although in reality the cow doesn't just give us its milk—we have to take it from her. But cows also have hides that can be used to make shoe soles. And that same hide can be used to wrap the cow up. In other words: to keep her from falling apart. Manure helps cows know what they're doing. The male cow is called a bull, and that is the one used in bullfights. But apart from that, bulls are good for nothing else, since they produce no milk and are not edible, as their meat is too tough to chew comfortably. Bulls only become useful again when they lose their intelligence, for then they are turned into oxen and put to work pulling the plow.

But dogs are the cutest animals. They're also the smartest, since they can learn to do so many things. If you want to teach a dog something, the first thing you have to do is know more than the dog. But there are also tricks that help, like giving them a treat every time they do something right. For example: you throw a ball far away and then tell them to fetch it. So, if the dog brings you the ball, you give him a little bit of food. But if he doesn't bring you the ball, you have to go get it yourself and you don't give the dog any

food. In other words: it’s better if he doesn’t bring the ball, because then you can eat what you were going to give the dog.

Of all animals, pigs are the dirtiest, but on the inside they're very tasty.

Animals with humps are called camels; but Popis says that the camel got its hump because they tried to thread it through the eye of a needle.

Giraffes have the longest necks. And it's a good thing they do, because if their necks weren't so long, their heads would be floating in the air.

Other animals that are very beautiful are horses. And they’re also very useful, since they can be ridden, used to pull carts, carry things, and so on and so forth. Professor Jirafales says that the Chinese were the first to use horses, but Chilindrina says that's not true, they were previously used by mares.

Today we continued studying animals. Professor Jirafales explained to us that animals that eat meat are carnivores; those that eat fruit are frugivores; those that eat insects are insectivores, and so on.

Then Quico said that people who eat enchiladas are “enchiladavores” and those who eat gordas pellizcadas are “gordas pellizcadavores”.

But Professor Jirafales scolded Quico for saying that.

Then he asked which animals ate everything, and I replied that the ones who ate everything were the rich.

Entry 7

When Sr. Barriga comes to collect the rent, Ron Damon gets so nervous that he stutters when he speaks.

For example, instead of saying:

"Be patient, Sr. Belly (Barriga)"

he says to him,

"Have a belly, Sr. Patience".

And in the same way he said to him,

"You've got quite the belly, Sr. Wisdom".

And also,

"Give me a belly, Sr. Charity"

—and so on.

But Sr. Barriga has already threatened to kick him out of the neighborhood, saying he's tired of coming to collect rent without ever getting paid. So Ron Damón advised him to rest by staying home, but Sr. Barriga told him he was a shameless man and that he had to pay the fourteen months' rent he owed him, and that he'd better do it before he kicked him out onto the street. So Ron Damón told him that he didn't have any money at the moment, but not to worry; he wouldn't forget his debt for the rest of his life.

And he has kept his word, for he never forgets that he still owes him.

Entry 8

Professor Jirafales scolded me for coming to school with dirty ears, but I couldn't very well leave them at home, could I? Then he told me I should wash my ears. But why? I can still hear just fine. And then he told me I should wash my neck and hands too, and I told him I had already washed my hands. The problem was that then he asked me when I last washed my hands; but I don't have that kind of memory. Finally, he asked me when I last took a shower, but honestly, I haven’t taken my last shower yet. You’d have to ask

that of people who have already died, because those of us who are still alive can't know when the last time we'll take a shower will be.

He also said I shouldn't take a shower after breakfast. And anyone can see why—because if I had to take a shower after breakfast, I'd never get one.

In grammar class, the teacher explained to us that "syntax" doesn't mean there's a taxi strike in the city—as Ñoño thought—but rather the way words are arranged in a sentence. Then Popis said she already knew how to put the words in the prayer (sentence, the words are similar in Spanish) in the right order, and she blurted out:

"Our Father, who art in heaven…"

—but the teacher told her he wasn't talking about the prayer we say to God, but about sentences in general. So Popis said:

"Our General who art in the Armed Forces…"

—but she couldn't continue because the teacher told her she'd better pay attention to what he was saying.

And what he was saying is that many people are ruining the language, and that there's a risk they won't be able to communicate with each other anymore, just like what happened in the Torre de Papel, it was a tower they'd been building for ages, and they wanted it to be so tall, so tall, that it could reach the sky—but how silly, right? Because if it's hard enough to build with reinforced concrete, just imagine if it were made of paper.

Anyway, Professor Jirafales told us that that was where the languages, or tongues, diverged. This made Chilindrina jump and look startled. And so she asked:

"—What did you say happened?"

And the teacher repeated:

"—That's where the tongues diverged."

Then Chilindrina asked:

"So what were they doing?"

And the teacher repeated that what they were building was a tower.

He then clarified that when he spoke of "tongues," he was referring to languages, which prompted Ñoño to start bragging that his dad knew many languages. He asked Popis if the same was true of her Aunt Florinda, but Popis told him no—that Aunt Florinda didn't even know her own language, since she kept biting her tongue all the time.

The teacher then went on to explain everything to us, saying that what happened in the paper tower was that everyone started to realize that each person was speaking a different language. —But he didn't clarify whether they were later dubbed or given Spanish subtitles.

Entry 9

La Chilindrina says that Doña Clotilde is the Witch of 71—because she lives in apartment number 71. Quico and Popis think so too, but Jaimito the Mailman says that's not true, because if she were a witch, why doesn't she cast a spell to turn herself into a young, pretty woman?

So I don't believe in witches either.

But they definitely could exist! There's no way to know for sure whether she's a witch or not, but just to be on the safe side, it's best to never run into Doña Clotilde.

Whenever I run into her, I get really scared and freeze up. I mean, I just freeze and can't even move. So they have to splash cold water on me to get me moving again.

By the way, one day Popis asked me what it feels like when you freeze, but it’s not easy to explain, because what happens is that you start to feel as if you’re not feeling anything at all. Then you feel like you’re not feeling as much, and so on, until you feel like you’re no longer feeling what you’re feeling.

Then Popis herself reminded me that Doña Clotilde is in love with Ron Damón; and she said that only a witch would be capable of that.

Plus, the Witch of '71 is always giving Ron Damón cakes, and La Chilindrina thinks she might be putting toloache and other stuff like that in them—the kind of stuff that turns people into idiots. But I think that, to be an idiot, Ron Damón didn't need to eat anything.

DOÑA CLOTILDE (LA BRUJA DEL 71)

Entry 10

We had a history exam yesterday.

There were ten questions. And I only got the first one wrong.

I didn't have time to answer the rest.

The thing about history is that teachers cheat—they ask you about things that happened before you were even born. And worst of all, it’s getting harder and harder to study because things just keep happening.

For adults, on the other hand, it was very easy, since by the time they were in school, almost nothing had happened.

But history classes are really fun anyway—it's like listening to stories.

Like the one where they staged a revolution to make things better.

After the exam, we've had a lot more history classes, and so I don't forget them, I'm going to write down everything I can remember.

There was a president named Don Porfirio, who was the one who put up with the Mexicans the longest. But presidents can only serve as president for six years, and when they realized that Don Porfirio had already been in office much longer, they told him that wasn't allowed. Then along came a guy named Francisco Madero—just like the street—and declared the War of the Revolution. And he was winning! Then Francisco Madero became president; but not for long, because someone else came along who was terrible, killed Madero, and even removed him from office.

Then another Revolutionary War broke out. But it wasn't against Don Porfirio; it was everyone against everyone else, because everyone wanted to be president. The only one who didn't want to be president was Emilio Zapata. What he wanted was for everyone to be a peasant. The problem was that the wealthy landowners preferred to be wealthy landowners rather than peasants; and since they couldn't come to an agreement, the peasants started killing the wealthy landowners, and the wealthy landowners started killing the peasants. And in the end, the land wasn't occupied by either the peasants or the wealthy landowners, but by the dead they had to bury; because so many were killed during that time that, on average, one person died for every person alive.

There was also a cowboy named Pancho Villa, who had many friends and many women. But the one he cherished most was his horse, named Siete Leguas. And it is said

that Pancho Villa was such a skilled marksman with a pistol that wherever he aimed, the bullet would hit. And he kept aiming.

The smartest of them all was named Carranza, since he was the best at reading and writing—for which he wore a pair of tiny glasses like these. Carranza also knew how to make laws. On the other hand, he didn't even know how to hold a gun. He was better at holding other things.

But the one who caught the most was a guy named Obregón, who had only one hand. But that was enough for him.

The most curious thing of all is that in Mexico there are many streets named after presidents, and one president who has streets named after him.

Entry 11

The other day, on my way home from school, I saw Jaimito pruning the rose bushes in the pots. I asked him why he was mistreating the plants like that, but Jaimito said he wasn't mistreating them; he was just pulling out a few shoots.

For a moment I thought Jaimito was losing his mind, but then he explained to me that it’s not that plants have feet like people (because then they would have walked away), but that’s what we call the little twigs that are cut off. Then those twigs are planted in other pots and start to grow until they become rose bushes that bloom and everything.

Jaimito says these new rose bushes are like the offspring of the other one. And I told him it’s a good thing kids aren’t born like rose bushes, because then they’d have to cut off a stem from the mother plant and plant it in a pot for it to grow. That means each mother plant couldn’t have more than two offspring.

The thing is, Jaimito knows a lot about plants because there are lots of trees and flowers and all that in Tangamandapio. We know this because Jaimito is always telling us lovely things about Tangamandapio, which is the town where he was born. And I imagine it must be a very pretty town, because whenever he talks about it, Jaimito says it’s “a charming little town with crimson sunsets.” And when he thinks about it, he ends up making those puppy-dog eyes.

Jaimito loves plants so much that he doesn't even laugh when people make jokes about them. For example: one day he was telling us about fragrant flowers, and he got upset when Godínez said that the smelliest plants are the ones on your feet. Then Popis said that the most dangerous plants are power plants, and Jaimito got angry again.

That's why I think Jaimito should be a gardener instead of a mailman, but he says he's been a mailman his whole life. The problem is that when he comes home from work, he’s always exhausted by the time he gets to the neighborhood. And what tires him out the most is having to carry his bike, since Jaimito the Mailman doesn’t know how to ride a bike. But he can't say he doesn't know how to ride a bike, because if his bosses found out, he'd lose his job as a mail carrier. And that's why he gets home so tired.

Then he feels tired all day. And that's why he doesn't want to do anything: because he'd rather avoid getting tired, as he puts it.

I think what happened was that Jaimito started working as a mailman before bicycles were even invented, because the old guy is as old as the hills. Of course, he never wants to say how old he is, but I imagine he's at least 400. That's why his skin hangs off him like the neck of a turkey.

Anyway, Jaimito the Mailman says he'd like to spend his final days in Tangamandapio, but I think that's highly unlikely. Unless he heads out there in the next fifteen minutes.

JAIMITO EL CARTERO

Entry 12

Ñoño got really mad when we said his dad looks like a slob. But what fault is it of ours that his dad looks like a slob?

After that, there was no way to cheer Ñoño up. And that's why he threatened us all, saying:

"—Just you wait; I'm going to report you for spilling the water from the tank."

So he let the truth slip, because what he really meant was that he was going to tell on us to his dad.

And that's how he was when Doña Clotilde found him. Doña Clotilde told him he shouldn't cry over it and that he should learn from her—that she doesn't get angry when people call her a "witch."

But I'm sure that's a lie, because I've seen many times how Doña Clotilde gets angry when people call her that. Nevertheless, she insisted she was telling the truth; and then, as proof, Ñoño told her:

"Witch, witch, witch!"—like that, three times.

And Doña Clotilde acted as if nothing had happened.

That gave me the courage to walk up to her and call her a "witch," but Doña Clotilde still didn't get angry. And the same thing happened with Popis, Quico, and Godínez—she didn't get angry when they called her a "witch" either.

But we were all so happy to know that we could now call her "witch" without any risk, when Chilindrina showed up and ruined our party. She came over asking why we were so happy, and I told her it was because Doña Clotilde doesn't get mad anymore when we call her "witch"; but instead of cheering up, Chilindrina got very serious, as if she were hesitating. So I said to her:

"If you don't believe me, go call her a witch and see if she gets mad."

But Chilindrina answered.

"If she's not going to get mad, why should I call her a witch?"

Then the rest of us realized the mistake we'd made, because the best part of calling her "witch" was seeing the dumbfounded look on Doña Clotilde's face. And we

understood it even better when we saw that La Chilindrina started crying with sadness as she reminisced about the good old days.

"That woman," she told us, *"had always been so kind to us; all it took was for someone to say, 'Watch out, here comes the Witch of '71!' and she'd instantly make those angry faces that always made us laugh. And now, all of a sudden, that ungrateful woman is taking away those sweet moments of happiness we'd enjoyed so much."*

Then Chilindrina made us even more worried, because she told us the same thing could happen if Doña Florinda didn't get angry when we called her "Old Chancluda (Old Flip-Flop)". But the good thing was that Doña Florinda happened to be walking by at that moment and overheard the comment; she immediately blurted out "That's just the way it is, and that was the downside of living among the chusma (lowlives)". And all that, of course, while pulling that melted-candle face that we find so amusing. After that, Chilindrina said something I didn't quite understand, so I asked her to repeat it so I could write it down.

And this is what she said:

"With what she just did, Doña Florinda is reminding us that we must never lose faith in humanity".

Entry 13

Ron Damón says he wouldn't be afraid to go to Hell when he dies, since he's sure they wouldn't give him more than two or three years there. And even less so if, instead of locking him up in the big one, they sent him to Eastern Purgatory, for example. Or Northern Purgatory, let's say.

I asked him how he could be so sure of that, and Ron Damón told me it was all a matter of having some “connections”—that’s what he said. He, for example, had been very close friends with Father José—who passed away last year—and surely must be in a very good position over there in the afterlife.

But the plain truth is that Ron Damon didn’t seem all that confident, to put it mildly, because he later told me that if Father José’s lever failed him, he’d have no choice but to pay a “bribe.” And that would be much harder to pull off, because Ron Damon has never had a penny to his name. But aside from all that, I began to wonder if they accepted “bribes” in Hell; although Ron Damón told me not to worry about that, because if a judge accepts them, the Devil certainly does. Because there’s no way the Devil turns out to be an innocent little angel.

Entry 14

In each classroom at school, they picked one child to collect donations for the Red Cross. And in my classroom, they picked me. They gave me a white-painted jar with a red cross on it. There are two holes on top that people use to put money in. One is long and narrow, and the other is round. The funny thing is that the long, narrow hole is for coins, which are round, and the round one is for bills, which are long and narrow. But it turns out that asking people for money isn't easy at all.

La Chilindrina, for example, said she had already given. I asked her when, and she told me it was last year. So I told her we needed to contribute every year, since there are people getting hit by cars, traffic accidents, and all that every year;

but Chilindrina told me it wasn't her fault. Finally, without much enthusiasm to speak of, she agreed to drop in a coin.

I couldn't hear what it was, but she told me it was a five-peso coin. However, to me it sounded like it was a 50-cent coin.

But at least Chilindrina contributed something, unlike Popis, who didn't contribute a thing. And to top it all off, she even tried to make a joke—when I asked her if she had contributed yet, Popis told me, "As if I were a chicken." I clarified that I was talking about contributing money, but Popis told me she didn't have a single penny. Then Chilindrina told her that some people, instead of giving money, give blood, which is useful because in accidents a lot of people lose blood. To this, Popis said that if people lose things, it's because they don't pay attention to where they leave them; but Chilindrina explained to her that what happens is that people's blood gets drained from the injuries they suffer in accidents, and then they're taken to the Red Cross hospital, where they're refilled with blood. Popis told her she already understood; and that she couldn't donate money, but she could donate blood. But the truth is that the total idiot hadn't understood a thing, because then she said we had to wait for them to kill the chicken; and when I asked her which chicken, she answered that she was talking about a chicken her Aunt Florinda had bought last week. In other words, the total airhead was thinking she could help out with chicken blood, not realizing that humans can only be transfused with the blood of other humans.

Then Popis asked where she could get that kind of blood, and Chilindrina said:

"From your nose".

And Chilindrina herself helped out by giving her a good slap; the problem was that Popis couldn't help by donating that blood, because the silly girl ran off home, saying she was going to tattle on Chilindrina to her Aunt Florinda.

Then Ñoño showed up, and he did contribute a twenty-peso bill to the Red Cross. I know the amount for a fact because I saw the bill with my own eyes. What's more, Ñoño himself clearly told us that he was contributing twenty pesos, knowing that someday he might have an accident and need to be taken to the Red Cross. The problem is that in that case, the twenty pesos wouldn't do any good, because if Ñoño were to have an accident, they'd need at least two stretchers just to lift him up. And to transport him, they might even need two ambulances! And then to get him back to his blood-filled state! Not even a water tank would be enough!

I was thinking about all that when Quico came out of his house, followed by Popis. They both looked very determined, since Popis had spread the rumor that Chilindrina had slapped her right across the face. And I even thought Quico was going to hit Chilindrina—but no. He hit me instead.

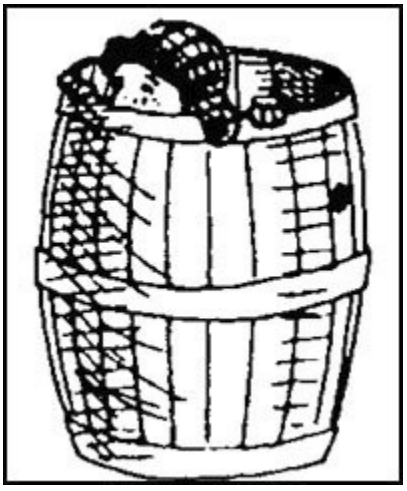
Ñoño helped me get up, but when I looked for Quico, that coward had already taken off running. Then Chilindrina realized I was really angry, and she told me to calm down. Then, as if trying to change the subject, she asked me if I had already donated anything to the Red Cross. I told her I hadn't given anything, but that I was planning to send something. La Chilindrina asked me what I was planning to send to the Red Cross, and I replied:

"An injured person".

And I waited for Quico to come back.

LA CHILINDRINA

Entry 15



There weren't as many people back then as there are now, because at that time there were only Adam and Eve. Or rather, there was just Adam, who was the first man. What happened was that one day he fell asleep, and when he woke up, they had already taken one of his ribs. And then hands, legs, a head, and everything else—except for a penis—began to grow out of that rib, until Miss Eve was complete.

Adam and Eve lived in a very beautiful place called Paradise, which was like a forest full of flowers, with birds, deer, and lions—but the lions were tame. In Paradise, eating apples was forbidden. But one day a viper named Serpent arrived and advised Adam and Eve to eat several apples. So it was a serpent that had already learned to speak.

Because back then, serpents were so different that they even had hands—we know this because the serpent tempted Eve, and if it hadn't had hands, how could it have tempted her?—But Eve didn't tell Adam that the serpent had tempted her, because men get very angry when someone tempts their wife.

In any case, Adam and Eve were punished for their disobedience. And that is why they were driven out of Paradise. The one who drove them out was an angel who carried a sword like the ones used in Star Wars. But on top of that, they were given other punishments as well. For example: Adam had to eat bread smeared with the sweat dripping from his forehead, and Eve was punished by having to endure great pain whenever she gave birth.

But since they had nothing else to do, they started having children. They named their firstborn son Cain, and their second son Abel. Abel was a very obedient and very good boy. Cain, on the other hand, was always a source of embarrassment to his mother. The first time she was embarrassed was when she was feeding him, because Cain had a donkey's jaw, just like Quico. And it's not the same to breastfeed an ordinary baby as it is to breastfeed one with a donkey's jaw. But the worst blow Eve suffered came when the boys were a little older, because one day Cain got very angry with his brother and struck him with his jaw. But the blow was so hard that Abel fell to the ground, and by the time he realized it, he was already dead.

After that, Adam and Eve died as well.

Entry 16

In life, some things are expensive because they cost a lot of money, while others cost very little and are therefore cheap.

I, for one, am easy to please.

That's why Chilindrina looks at me with such pity and says:

“Poor Chavito! Doesn’t it make you sad to realize that you’re just you?”

But what can I do? Because we've often wondered what we'd like to be when we grow up, and I've never known how to answer that.

The others do: Chilindrina would like to become president, Popis wants to be a TV actress, Ñoño wants to own lots of restaurants, Godínez wants to be a soccer player, and Quico wants to be just like his mom.

So Quico is even more of an idiot than we thought, because you have to be an idiot to want to be like that old chancluda who just spends her time scolding everyone. Besides, when people grow up, men should act like men and women should act like women. So Quico is going to be one of those guys who wears earrings.

But then Quico clarified that no, that wasn't true. And he also told us:

"I just want to be like my mom in that I want to have a son just like me."

Entry 17

People say you can't breathe properly in this city anymore because the air is so polluted. People don't seem to care much about another problem that's getting worse every day, what the noise is like. Noise is meant to be heard. But the problem is that it can also damage many people’s hearing, as happens in nightclubs. It’s not that listening to music is bad; the problem is listening to it at full volume. In other words, it’s the volume that’s harmful. And that’s why Ñoño is always sick: because of how loud he is.

In addition to nightclubs, the noise from motorcycles is also extremely annoying. Especially when they run you over.

Entry 18

There's a new girl at school named Paty, but everyone calls her Patricia Jiménez for short. Paty sits at the desk behind mine, but Professor Jirafales insists that I should look at the blackboard instead of looking at Paty. The good thing is that during recess I can spend the whole time watching her. When she runs, her hair looks really pretty. Sometimes she stares at me. And then I can't keep looking at her anymore, because—who knows why—but when she looks at me, I feel something… I don't know.

And when she laughs, I feel the same way—only much more so.

Entry 19

I was playing hopscotch when Quico came out of his house eating a banana. A moment later, he asked me:

"Want some?"

And I was going to say yes, because I was really craving that banana, but then I remembered that he always does the same thing—first he asks me:

"Want some?"

And when I say yes, he says to me:

"Well, go ahead and buy it."

So I told him no, that I didn't want to, and I explained why. Then Quico said to me:

“Well, that's too bad, because this time I really was planning to give you half my banana.”

That made me so happy that I said to him:

“Yes, I do.”

And then he said to me:

“Well, go ahead and buy it.”

The worst part was that I didn't see where he'd thrown the banana peel. So I slipped on it and fell to the ground. And Quico, instead of worrying about me, burst out laughing as if he were making fun of me. So I slapped him hard across his skinny pig-like cheeks, and he started crying right away. Leaning against the wall.

The problem is that Quico cries as if he were gargling tap water. And he does it so loudly that the whole neighborhood can hear him. That’s why Ron Damón even came out of his house to see what was going on. Just as I was about to start explaining, Doña Florinda came in from the street and asked her son what was wrong, and Quico replied:

“He hit me.”

But since he didn't say who had hit him, Doña Florinda thought it had been Ron Damón. And as always, Ron Damón was the one who ended up taking the blame.

Then Doña Florinda said to Quico:

“Come on, honey; don’t hang out with the chusma.”

Then Quico said to Ron Damón:

“Chusma, chusma!”

Then Quico and his mom went inside.

But Ron Damon was so angry that he threw his hat on the ground. And then he got even angrier, because his hat landed in a pile of dog poop.

I realized that Ron Damon was so angry that he was definitely going to take it out on me, but I got a move on and took off running. The problem was that just then Sr. Barriga was walking into the neighborhood, and I ran right into his belly and knocked him to the ground. Then Sr. Barriga said:

“It had to be El Chavo del Ocho!”

And I replied:

“It wasn’t really on purpose”.

But he replied that it was always the same, that I always greeted him with a slap when he came to the neighborhood, and that I always said to him: “It wasn’t really on purpose”.

So I told him we were even, because he was always saying the same thing too: “It had to be El Chavo del Ocho!”

Entry 20

This morning, during recess, Paty came up behind me, covered my eyes with her hands, and said:

"Guess who I am."

And I knew it was Paty because she's the only one whose voice sounds so nice when you hear it. But I couldn't say anything to her because I started feeling a kind of tickling sensation.

Then Chilindrina came up behind me, covered my eyes with her hands, and said:

"Guess who I am."

As if I wouldn't recognize that total moron!

Then Chilindrina took some candies from Paty, and Paty started crying. I felt like crying too, but I held it in. So I went over, took the candies from Chilindrina, and gave them back to Paty. Then it was Chilindrina who started crying. It really gets on my nerves to hear Chilindrina cry, because she always cries as if she were being killed; and those screams are enough to make you go deaf.

What a difference from Paty, who, when she cries, just makes a little sound like this: very soft; and her little eyes get like this: all teary, and they even sparkle more!

In the end, I cried too—because Chilindrina hit me on the head with a rock.

Entry 21

If I ever won the lottery, the very first thing I'd like to do is treat myself to a meal.

Because the most important thing in life is eating. Because if you don't eat, you die. And if you die, when are you going to eat? And if you're not going to eat, why die? That's why it's better to eat than to die.

By the way, Professor Jirafales says that the human intestine is about six meters long; but since I've eaten so little, I must have at least two or three meters of unused intestine.

And I'm not entirely sure, but I think the last time I chewed a piece of meat was when I bit my tongue.

Once I got so sick that they took me to a really nice hospital, where the nurses were called nuns, and they were so kind that they let me eat three times a day. But the bad part was that I was only sick for four days, and then I got better. Now I’m waiting to get sick again, so I can eat three times a day once more.

Entry 22

Yesterday was Paty's birthday. I didn't know that. But I found out when Ñoño arrived and gave her a present. Then Paty gave Ñoño a kiss.

One of these days, I'm going to grab Ñoño and smash every bone in his face.

Entry 23

Of all the stories Professor Jirafales has told us, one of the most beautiful is the story of a man named Noah, who built boats and gathered animals. One day, God told Noah that the Flood was coming soon—it's like a downpour, but a bit heavier. So Noah asked Him what he should do, and God advised him to build a huge ship big enough to hold all the animals. And the elephant, too.

But the only ones who helped Noah were his sons—there were three of them—and his sons' wives. Everyone else in town, on the other hand, didn't help at all; they just spent their time making fun of Noah and thinking the poor guy was crazy. And Noah would tell them that they were the crazy ones and that they shouldn't complain later when they were drowning.

However, more than people's teasing, what worried Noah was that he had to pair up the animals, since they had to be male and female, and it's often not that easy to tell which is the male and which is the female. Of course, there are some that are very easy to tell apart—donkeys, for example—but there are others that I don't know how Noah managed to distinguish, such as birds, fish, snakes, worms, and so on and so forth.

But in any case, Noah managed to gather all the pairs of animals and asked them to board the ship, which, by the way, was called the Ark. But they got in just in time, because a little while later the Flood began to pour down; and since sewers hadn't been invented yet, the streets started to flood with water. And then it kept raining so heavily that before long you couldn't see the ground, the houses, or anything else. The only thing you could see was the little boat, in which Noah, his family, and the other animals were traveling. Noah thought everyone else would be green with envy, but that wasn't the case: they were drowning.

The problem was that one day, with nothing much to do, Noah got the idea to invent wine. And of course, he got drunk. And he was so drunk that he couldn't even get up to peek out and see if it had stopped raining. So, what he did was grab a bird and order it to go out and see if it was still raining. Then one of his sons started teasing Noah, telling him that birds couldn't talk, unless they were parrots. But parrots can't tell us if it's raining or not; all they can say are things like:

"Give me your paw, little parrot"

"Go to hell, you little brat"—and things like that.

So there was no point in sending the bird.

But Noah was still so drunk that he didn't even feel ashamed when his son made fun of him. Instead, he cursed his son's children. In other words, he took it out on his grandchildren, who hadn't done anything wrong. The next day, Noah said he wasn't foolish enough to expect the bird to speak Spanish; instead, he sent it out to see if it would come back dry or wet—because if it came back

“Wet” meant it was still raining. And the same goes the other way around.

The problem was that the bird didn't come back, dead or alive.

So they were still in the same boat. And Noah couldn't send another bird because he might run out—since he only had two of each.

Until finally someone thought to look out and saw that the rain had stopped. Then everyone got off the boat and started having children to replace all the people who had drowned. Some of the children turned out to be white, others black, and still others Chinese.

But the most interesting thing about Noah was how long he lived—I don't remember exactly, but I think it was over 900 years. In other words, he lived even longer than Jaimito the Postman. And many people wonder how it's possible for a person to live that long; but the thing is, back then there were no doctors, no hospitals, or anything like that.

Entry 24

Yesterday, Professor Jirafales told us to copy a sentence from the Natural Science textbook. Here it is: “Human beings use their senses to interact with the world around them.”

And this morning the teacher asked if we knew what the senses were. So Popis said that the senses are those jerks who, when you do something to them, won't talk to you anymore or anything, and they even stop saying hi to you. But the teacher told him that he was talking about a different kind of sense—the ones mentioned in the book. And there are five of these senses: sight, hearing, smell—that is, the sense of smell—taste, and touch—that is, when you feel something.

Then the teacher asked Paty what her eyes were for, and I jumped in to answer, “Paty’s eyes are for looking pretty.”

Then Chilindrina pinched me so hard my arm was on fire. And the teacher told me that he had asked Paty the question. Then Paty replied that her eyes served two purposes: to open them when she’s awake and to close them when she’s sleepy. But Chilindrina told her that they’d also be useful for crying when she breaks everything called a face—which I won’t allow.

Professor Jirafales scolded Chilindrina for being so quarrelsome; but she said it was infuriating that people would respond with nonsense. So I told her that Pati never responded with nonsense. And that made Chilindrina even angrier, and she said to me:

“You’d better shut your mouth, Chavo,” she said, and then added, *“Do you know what your eyes are for?”*

And I told her that my eyes are for looking at Paty.

Then Chilindrina kicked me in the shin and said:

“No way! Your eyes are good for nothing but getting eye boogers and gunk in them.”

Professor Jirafales had to calm Chilindrina down, which took quite a bit of effort. And then, just when it seemed like things had calmed down, the teacher asked her if she knew what ears were for, and Chilindrina replied that they were for

“listening to the nonsense Chavo was spouting.”

This made the teacher really angry, since he had always told us he didn't like derogatory language—but he sure did let loose with some choice words one day when he got into an argument with Ron Damon. And Chilindrina told him that she didn't like those words either, and that the proof is that she only says them when she's really angry—just like what happened to the teacher when he was arguing with Ron Damón. After that, Chilindrina calmed down, and the teacher continued with the natural science lesson.

He told us that the sense used to perceive smells is called the sense of smell, and that there is also an organ responsible for that. Then he asked if we knew where that organ was, and Godínez replied that the organ is located at the back of the church. But the teacher told him he was talking about the nose—though he didn't specify whose nose.

Then the teacher asked me if I knew what "taste" was, and I replied that I did: that "taste is what you feel when Paty arrives."

Then I felt another kick to my shin from Chilindrina—just when it seemed she had calmed down; I mean, no wonder Ron Damon says it's impossible to understand women.

The teacher clarified that when he spoke of taste, he was referring to something you feel in your mouth. So I said, "The best thing you could feel in your mouth would be a kiss from Paty."

But I couldn't tell if I'd answered correctly, because right then Chilindrina kicked me in the shin again, not to mention smacking me on the head and pinching my neck. The good thing was that the teacher quickly grabbed Chilindrina. But when he let her go, she started saying:

"I'm just so sick of it! His eyes are only looking at Paty! His ears are only for listening to Paty! And the same goes for his sense of smell and taste!"

And then, as if remembering something that frightened her, she ended by saying:

"And there's still the matter of touch!"

And she ran out of the classroom. Then Professor Jirafales told us not to worry; she'd be right back. And he continued with the lesson, explaining that all the senses are important. He said that, for example, it's very unfortunate that some people lose their sight. And Godínez said that they then work as soccer referees. Then he talked about those who lose their hearing, and Ñoño said that they become "rock 'n' roll" singers. Then he said it was also unfortunate for someone to lose their sense of smell, but Paty said no, that was actually a good thing, because people who lose their sense of smell don't suffer when they go into the restroom at a movie theater.

Finally, the teacher talked about touch and asked how we could tell, for example, if something was smooth or wrinkled. And Popi replied:

"It depends on whether he's my age or yours."

The teacher said it would be better to give another example and asked how we could tell if an object had thorns. I replied that we should look closely at the object, and if it was a chayote, it would definitely have thorns.

By then, the teacher seemed almost desperate; he even shouted at me, saying:

"What do you use your hands for?"

And I replied, “I wish I could use them to make a little something for Pati,” but I had barely finished speaking when I realized that La Chilindrina had just come back. She walked over to me and said:

“I’m going to tell you what my hands are good for!”

And she used them to beat me up worse than when I got into a fight with Godínez.

Entry 25

Professor Jirafales told us to bring in a report on malnutrition, but I didn't have the slightest idea what to write. Then Chilindrina told me I didn't need to write anything—all I had to do was bring in a picture of myself.

Entry 26

A sign appeared in the neighborhood today that reads: “Animals are prohibited in this neighborhood.”

So I copied it exactly as it was written, but Professor Jirafales told us that the sign has a lot of spelling mistakes. The thing is, it was written by Ron Damon, who’s really dumb.

But the idea wasn't Ron Damon's; it was Doña Florinda's. She just paid Ron Damon to write the sign, because Doña Florinda is the one who doesn't like animals—except for Quico.

Doña Clotilde—that is, the Witch of 71—got very angry when she saw that sign, but Jaimito the Mailman told her not to worry, that as long as she paid her rent on time, no one could stop her from living there. So Doña Clotilde got angry at Jaimito too, and told him she wasn't some kind of animal.

Jaimito asked her why she had gotten angry when she saw the sign, and Doña Clotilde replied that it was because she had a little dog. Doña Clotilde's little dog is very cute, but very delicate—because he's a very refined breed. That's why they feed him better than they feed me; because I'm not a refined breed, but rather an ordinary one. Doña Clotilde is very affectionate with her little dog and takes care of him as if he were her son. And La Chilindrina says that's because Doña Clotilde is an old maid; she says that old maids almost never feel like having children. And that's why, instead of children, they have dogs.

But women gain a lot of weight when they're expecting a baby, and I don't remember Doña Clotilde gaining weight when she was expecting the dog. So it's not the same thing.

It later came to light that Doña Florinda had that sign put up because she got very angry when Doña Clotilde's little dog ran into her house and peed on her carpet.

But it didn't do any good, because after she put up that sign, the little dog went back inside and pooped on the living room rug again. The thing is, Doña Florinda forgot that dogs can't read.

Entry 27

Paty doesn't go to school anymore.

I think her family moved somewhere else and took her with them. But I don't know where that place is.

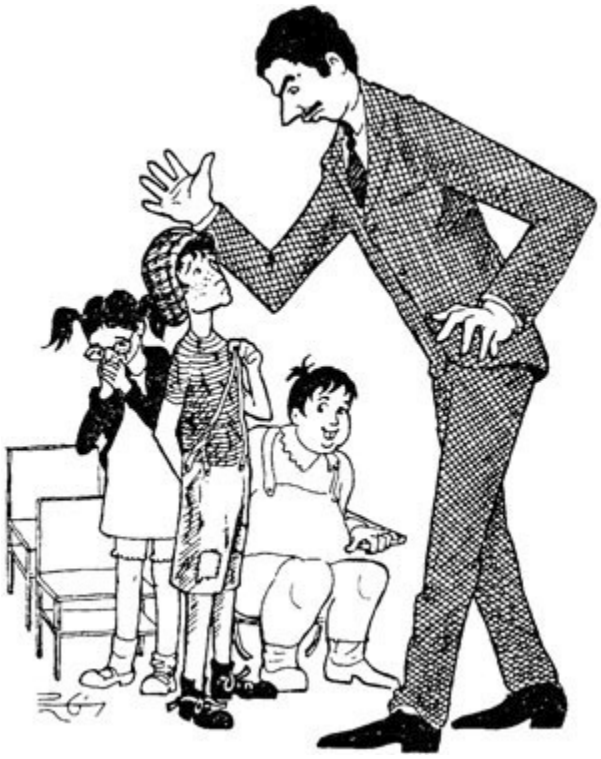
Where could Paty be?

I wonder what she's up to?

Now there's another girl sitting on the same bench where Paty used to sit. But what a difference! I don't think it's right for someone else to come along and take Pati's place. That's why I removed her from there.

Later I found out that it was Professor Jirafales who put the other girl there. But if that’s what he did, he would have been better off not putting her there at all.

Entry 28



This morning at school, Mr. Jirafales told us the story of Christopher Columbus, which is really interesting.

Christopher Columbus was an explorer who once went to see the Queen of Spain and told her that he was eager to set out to discover America. The queen said she thought it was a good idea and asked what was stopping him from doing so. Columbus then told her that he didn't have enough money for the passage; but the queen replied:

"Don't worry; I'll take care of it."

The queen, whose first name was Isabella and whose surname was “the Catholic,” went straight out to sell some very valuable jewels she owned, and in this way she raised enough money to buy three ships with their crews, which she then gave to Columbus. Shortly thereafter, Christopher Columbus set out in high spirits to discover America. He was on the flagship, which was called the “Santa Marina.” The other two were called “La Tinta” and “La Piña.” And they must not have been very good ships, because when Columbus spoke of them, he didn’t call them ships; he called them skulls. But the truth is, if someone gives you something, you can’t very well start making demands.

But discovering America wasn't easy, because there was a huge problem: no one knew where it was. However, just when they least expected it, a sailor started shouting:

“Land ho!”

Then everyone looked out and realized it was America.

There were many Native Americans there who were very surprised when they saw that the explorers already knew how to ride horses. Because the Indians didn't know what horses were and thought they were half-human, half-animal—the animal part was the lower half. But then the explorers had to dismount so they could walk, and that’s when the Indians realized they were people just like them, but with beards. And they said:

“Thank goodness.”

The explorers soon realized that there were many Native Americans living in the pyramids. And there were others who died in the pyramids. The reason people died in the pyramids was because their hearts were ripped out with a knife-like object.

They said they were human sacrifices; but I think they weren't human at all—quite the opposite: they were very inhumane.

Then there were some who even ate the dead. Until the explorers told them that eating human flesh is not allowed. And certainly not during Lent.

Then Christopher Columbus returned to Spain, and the queen asked him:

"How did it go?"

And he responded:

"Good, that's it."

But Christopher Columbus was so happy to have discovered America that he felt like coming back to discover it all over again.

In total, he discovered her four times. And so it went, until he died.

Entry 29

I wonder what Paty is up to?

Entry 30

Last night, Quico invited us over to watch a soccer game on his TV, but after a while Doña Florinda showed up and said that soccer was a spectacle only fit for the chusma. She added that what she really liked were soap operas. So she changed the channel and turned on a soap opera. And worst of all, not even Quico himself protested; the little rascal just sat there calmly watching the soap opera with his mom and Popis.

But then, just as I was about to leave, Professor Jirafales came running up at full speed, saying:

"Hurry up, Doña Florinda, switch to the channel showing the soccer game!"

This made Doña Florinda look as if she were about to burst into tears, and she asked:

"What should it say?"

"The channel that shows soccer," said the teacher. *"Don't you realize it's the championship final today?"*

Then Doña Florinda asked the teacher if he liked soccer, and the teacher said he loved it. And Doña Florinda said she did, too. So a little while later, we were already watching the game.

And thanks to that, I was able to learn a lot about soccer. For example: to be a good soccer player, the first thing you need to do is kick out a lot, because that way you might even hit the ball once in a while. Then you have to get close to your opponent and pull on his jersey, his shorts, his arms, or his hair. After that, you have to go down so the referee will call a penalty. I also learned that some players are better at kicking the ball with their right foot, while others are better with their left. Others are better at heading the ball. In addition to the players, there are also referees and linesmen on the field. Referees are there to send off players who protest. And the linesmen are there to raise their flags every time someone is about to score a goal. The spectators have a great time throwing all sorts of objects onto the court—firecrackers, bottles, half-eaten oranges, rolls of toilet paper, and so on and so forth. Some want one team to win, while others want the other team to win. But when the opposing team scores a goal, the player who scored it was offside. The ones who talk nonstop during the game are called commentators. But there are also others who are called reporters. And another one named Fernando. And all of them, according to Professor Jirafales, are also competing against each other. What they're competing in is destroying the language, according to Professor Jirafales, who spent the entire game saying:

"That's ridiculous! You don't say 'recepcionó,' you say 'recibió'!" and then, *"You don't say 'rechace,' you say 'rechazo'!"* and so on and so forth.

But soccer is still a beautiful game.

Entry 31

Yesterday, as we were walking into the classroom, I squashed a spider with my foot. The problem was that the spider was on Professor Jirafales's shoe, and he got really angry and scolded me. I mean, he was wrong, because instead of scolding me, he should have thanked me, since I saved his life by preventing the spider from biting him.

He later said that the spider wasn't poisonous and that there was therefore no danger, but you can't exactly go around asking spiders if they're poisonous or not.

The best thing to do is to stomp on them first and figure it out later.

Then the teacher asked us:

"Do you know what would happen if we killed every insect in the world?"

And Ñoño responded:

"We'd really miss La Chilindrina."

That made us all laugh, except for Chilindrina, who suddenly became very serious and said to Ñoño:

"Well, I'd actually rather be an insect than an elephant."

And then they started fighting, but since I sat between Ñoño and Chilindrina in class, I ended up taking most of the blows.

The good thing was that Professor Jirafales quickly pulled the two bullies apart. Then he explained that if we killed all the insects in the world, a lot of bad things would happen. For example: many plants that rely on insects to carry pollen from one flower to another would die out—pollen is a kind of fine dust that flowers use to reproduce.

So I said it would be impossible for us to kill all the insects, because it's obvious there are way more insects than people. I mean, all they'd have to do is swarm us to wipe us out. The teacher said I was right, but that there are other animals that are already becoming extinct anyway.

Then Popis said that if they're getting exhausted, it's because they've been exercising too much; but the teacher explained that "exhausted" also means "to run out" or "to become extinct." As an example, he mentioned a bird called the Firebird that is already on the verge of extinction.

Then the teacher asked us:

"Do you know who's causing them to go extinct?"

And Godínez replied:

"If the bird is on fire, it's up to the firefighters to put it out."

But the teacher said that it is humans who are wiping out not only those birds, but also many other animals.

However, he acknowledged that there are also animals that harm humanity. And then Quico said that fleas were a good example—they not only bother people but also bother dogs. So they don't just harm humanity, but also the dog world.

Then Popis remembered that a horse had once hurt her—it had thrown her to the ground while she was riding it. But then she realized it had been her own fault, because she, being such a fool, had turned to the right while the horse was turning to the left. In other words: the thing is, Popis doesn't know how to ride a horse. Well, I don't know how to ride either, but I imagine it can't be that hard; it's all about knowing how to keep your balance and holding on tight to the reins. Then Chilindrina said I was right.

"But there's something very important," she added, "between you and the horse, the horse is the only one who should take the reins in its mouth."

Then Ñoño mentioned that a horse had also hurt his dad. But Chilindrina said it must have been the other way around: that Mr. Barriga had hurt the horse by riding it, since no horse can bear that much weight on its back. But Ñoño said his dad had never ridden a horse. So we asked him if a horse had kicked his dad, and Ñoño replied no, not that either; he was talking about a horse that had hurt his dad by coming in last at the racetrack.

Then they asked me, and I replied that the animals that cause the most trouble are dogs when they have rabies and cats when they get into mischief.

Finally, La Chilindrina said that the animal causing the most harm to humanity is the stork.

Entry 32

Yesterday afternoon, Mrs. Clotilde gave Ron Damón some empanadas.

But Chilindrina said those empanadas might be bewitched to cast a spell on her dad, because Ron Damón has never wanted to marry Doña Clotilde, which is what she wants most in the world. So Chilindrina told me she had to make a sacrifice by tasting the empanadas before her dad did. So she ate an empanada. So I told her that I wanted to make a little sacrifice too. So I ate an empanada too. And then the two of us kept making sacrifices. Until we finish all the empanadas. It really is wonderful to make sacrifices for others!

The problem was that Ron Damón showed up just as I was finishing off the last empanada, and he got really mad at me. He couldn't get mad at Chilindrina because she wasn't there anymore. She had seen her dad coming through the window and remembered she had something very important to do. So Chilindrina couldn't help me explain to her dad that we'd made sacrifices for him; and since Ron Damon is so dense, he didn't get it at all. He even gave me a tap on the head.

DON RAMÓN

Entry 33

Professor Jirafales punished me because I said Quico is an idiot. And that wasn't fair, since the professor himself tells us all the time that we should always tell the truth. Well, maybe I was wrong; but just a little bit, because I said Quico was an idiot from birth, and La Chilindrina says that's not true; that Quico isn't an idiot from birth, but by a majority vote. We held a vote at school with all the kids in the class, and it turned out that the only vote against it was Quico's. So that just proved he was even more of an idiot than we thought, because only idiots don't realize they're idiots.

Just think—even Popis voted in favor! And Popis is Quico's cousin. You can really tell!

For example: One day, Professor Jirafales was talking about the four cardinal directions, and Popis said that cardinals are like bishops, but with a different hat.

And the other day, the teacher was telling us that Mexico lost half its territory, and Popis said:

"Because they don't pay attention to where they put things."

Professor Jirafales says that school is the fountain of knowledge, and that we children go there to drink from that fountain. But Chilindrina says that Popis has never drunk a single drop of water from that fountain of knowledge—she's never done more than gargle.

The thing is, according to Chilindrina, Popis is the stupidest person who ever went to that school. But I think Quico beats her.

Well, it just so happens that Popis and Quico are cousins. So it runs in the family.

Ñoño says the thing about Popis and Quico is that neither of them has ever put their brains to use. But I think that's a good thing, because it's better not to use things that don't work.

LA POPIS

Entry 34

Some people say there’s a thief living in the neighborhood, since a lot of things have gone missing lately—they’ve been stolen. Although it could also be that the things disappeared by magic, thanks to the Witch of ’71; but I already asked her, and she said no. By the way, the Witch of '71 got really mad at me for asking her that question, because she said it was like calling her a witch. But that’s not true, because I wouldn’t even dare to think that Miss Clotilde is a witch. Because what if she reads my mind and turns me into a toad?

So there must be a thief in the neighborhood. Which is wrong, because no one should steal other people's belongings.

Some people think the thief might be Ron Damón, but I don't buy it, because the other day someone stole Doña Florinda's iron, and Ron Damón has never been that bold. Because Ron Damón knows that Doña Florinda can really beat the crap out of him; like that one time she slapped him for about half an hour and told him it would be even worse next time.

Jaimito the Postman probably isn't capable of stealing either, since he prefers to avoid getting tired.

And some people said I was the thief, but that's not true. I fell down. I just stole some food. Like that time I stole a slice of cake that Doña Clotilde had left on her windowsill. But it was kind of an accident—I didn't really mean to steal that slice of cake; I just wanted to try it. And then I had another little bite.

And then I tried the rest.

Sr. Barriga still thinks Ron Damón is the neighborhood thief, since he still hasn't paid his rent. But Chilindrina told him that they're two very different things, since thieves hide and disguise themselves, while Ron Damón always goes around with his face uncovered. And I agreed with Chilindrina, telling them that, with a face like Ron Damón's, it takes a lot of courage to go around with it uncovered.

Chilindrina didn't like what I said, and she even claimed that it wouldn't help us support her dad.

Later, Chilindrina herself said that she was talking about people who cover their faces with scarves or whatever. That you can't trust them. Sr. Barriga did agree with that; but he told us that there are also many others who wear suits and ties, and that they are the ones who steal the most. And he explained to us that these thieves in suits and ties sometimes disguise themselves as things that we children can't quite understand yet, but that later, when we're adults, we'll find them everywhere.

Everyone keeps talking about the thief who must be lurking around the neighborhood. I said I'd like to be El Chapulín Colorado so I could catch him, but Quico said I wasn't cut out for that.

So I told him yes, and that I already had a plan to catch the thief, which involved leaving something in plain sight so we could keep an eye out and find out who was stealing it.

Quico really liked that idea; he said it would be like playing cops and robbers, but for real. So we decided that was what we should do.

I hope it works out well.

Last night we did what we had planned: Quico brought out the blender his mom uses for cooking and we set it up in the middle of the yard. Then we hid and started watching to see who would come and steal it.

Shortly after, Ron Damón arrived, tripped over the blender, and fell flat on his face. Then he got up, furious, and kicked the blender. But I'm sure it hurt him more than it hurt the blender, because he limped into his house—swearing up a storm.

But the blender wasn't stolen. So it's becoming increasingly clear that Ron Damón isn't the neighborhood thief.

The problem was that, when it was kicked, the blender ended up in a corner where it wasn't easy for people passing by to see it.

However, after a while, Quico and I saw a guy who doesn't live in the neighborhood walk through the gate, acting all silly. He was just about to walk back out the gate when he spotted the blender. So he grabbed it and ran off as fast as he could.

So that guy is most likely the thief.

But, just as I suspected, he doesn't live in the neighborhood.

This morning we saw that Mrs. Florinda was very worried; she said that a thief had broken into her house and stolen the blender she had just bought. And only Quico and I know that the thief didn't break into the house, but stole the blender from the patio. However, we didn't want to say anything until we were absolutely sure.

So, at dusk, we did the same thing we'd done the day before, except this time we put an electric coffee maker in the yard—one that Quico had also brought from his house. But the result was the same: the same guy came back and stole the coffee maker.

I mean, that's quite a coincidence, isn't it?

Doña Florinda still doesn't know the truth; this morning she mentioned that her electric coffee maker had been stolen, but she still believes that the thief broke into her house to steal it, and she doesn't even suspect that the coffee maker was in the backyard when the thief took it. But Quico and I had seen it perfectly clearly when we were spying on him.

However, just to be sure, we decided to repeat the test a third time. And now I'm just waiting for Quico to come out of his house with the toaster that Professor Jirafales just gave to Doña Florinda. We're going to leave it in the middle of the courtyard too, so we can spy on things and see who steals it; but I'm sure it'll be the same guy.

Last night I waited and waited, but nothing happened—Quico just wouldn't come out of his house with the toaster. And I think I ended up falling asleep.

But at noon today, Chilindrina told me she overheard a conversation between Doña Florinda and Professor Jirafales, in which she said she was very sad because she had caught Quico trying to steal the toaster the professor had just given her.

But worst of all, according to what Chilindrina heard, Quico said the whole idea had come from Chavo del Ocho—that's me—. So there's no way in hell I'm going near the old chancluda's house.

The only good thing about all that was that Doña Florinda told us how she had caught Quico off guard: by staying up late to spy and see who was coming in to steal.

So she blatantly copied my plan.

Entry 35

I really love listening to music. But only when the music is nice. I mean, when it feels good to listen to it. On the other hand, there are songs that, as soon as you hear them, make you want to cover your ears.

Professor Jirafales says there are three types of musical notes: quarter notes, half notes, and whole notes. But I think he's wrong, because in reality they're all round. What's different is that some have a stem and others don't. And the stems are different, too, because sometimes they have little flags on them.

He also said that white notes are worth twice as much as black notes, but La Chilindrina told him that only racists think that—that is, white people who don't get along with black people.

Then the teacher asked us if we knew which ones were the round ones, and I said that the round ones were Ñoño's sisters. Everyone laughed their heads off, except for Ñoño, who threw a solid-wood spinning top at my head and cut me badly. So I said to him:

"Next time, throw your sister at me."

But Popis said:

"No, Chavo; it'll crush you."

In the end, the teacher had to break us up.

Later, the class resumed, and Professor Jirafales said that in music, it's not just the sounds that matter, but the silences are also very important—especially when Quico sings!

Later, when we went out for recess, Ñoño asked me to give him back his spinning top. And I gave it back to him—right in the gut.

ÑOÑO

Entry 36

Ron Damón invited me yesterday to watch a bullfight on his TV, but I prefer soccer. The bullfighters won the bullfight. And to think there were six bulls and only three bullfighters! It's true that bulls have horns and bullfighters don't. But bullfighters have swords, while bulls do not. The bullfighters are assisted by the picador, a large man on horseback who carries a spear-like weapon. And there are also the others who rush in and stick banderillas into the bulls when they let their guard down.

The first thing bullfighters do is to confuse the bulls with a cape that is red on one side and not on the other. And since bulls don’t like the color red, they try to gore the cape.

That’s why the bullfighter has to be very quick to pull the cape away before the bull gores him. But there are bulls that are smarter than the bullfighter, and they pretend to charge the cape, but what they actually do is charge the bullfighter.

The gores hurt sooooo much, because they draw blood. Then they go and stick swords into the bull's back, which also hurts him sooooo much. Because bulls feel the same way people do. It's just that they can't speak Spanish, so they don't say anything. But you can tell.

Then they grab another cape called a muleta, but it doesn't look like the ones some people use to help them walk—I mean, they're made of cloth.

These crutches allow the bullfighter to continue fighting for a while longer.

But first, the picador had already thrust his lance into the bull. And that hurts them terribly, too.

I don't know if bulls have tears in their eyes like the rest of us. And since I couldn't see them up close, I don't know if they were crying, but they put them through so much that I think they were.

And then they even kill them.

Entry 37

This morning, during recess, instead of playing, we were discussing topics related to Mexican history. Ñoño said that Father Hidalgo was screaming in pain because his stomach hurt; but Popis said no, that the scream came from Father Hidalgo's wife, whose name was Dolores and whom they affectionately called Lolita. I thought that couldn't be true because priests are forbidden from marrying their wives. Then Chilindrina said that most don't get married, but there are a few who do. What happens is that the priests who get married give up being priests and go to work in the military. After all, that way they also send many souls to Heaven. Then Godínez joined the discussion and said that Father Hidalgo was indeed married, but not to Lolita—rather, to Spain—because Hidalgo is the Father of the Nation and Spain is the Motherland.

Godínez also showed us a page from a history book that reads: “Father Miguel Hidalgo and Costilla arrived.” So he arrived with his wife. What we did know was that Hidalgo’s closest friend was named San Miguel Allende. He also had a female friend named Corregidora Ortiz de Domínguez, who became very famous because her portrait appeared on the old five-cent coins. By the way, Professor Jirafales had scolded La Chilindrina, because when he asked her who Doña Corregidora’s greatest enemy had been, La Chilindrina replied:

“Her hairdresser.”

There was another discussion in class when the teacher asked what the biggest obstacle on Insurgentes had been. I said the traffic lights, and Popis said the traffic cops. Godínez said the potholes, but Chilindrina said no, because the potholes aren’t on Insurgentes but on the other streets. Then Ñoño said that, for his dad, the biggest obstacle on Insurgentes is that you’re not allowed to park your car there. And the others had other opinions, but just as the conversation was getting more lively, the teacher said he wasn’t talking about Insurgentes Avenue, but about the army where Father Hidalgo worked, and that their main obstacle had been that they weren’t well organized.

In other words: just like traffic lights and police officers.

Father Hidalgo's favorite food was meatballs with a crispy crust.

But the saddest part of all was that Father Hidalgo never got to see the end of the war because he had already been shot. It was all the fault of a traitor who had defected to the Spanish; they captured him, handcuffed him, and took him away.

But that happened right at the start of the war, which lasted eleven years. In other words, the Insurgents' victory is all the more impressive, because they were down a man from the very beginning.

The problem was that after the war, the Insurgents started arguing among themselves because they all wanted to be president. But the most ambitious were two men named Agustín and Túrbide, who even wanted to be emperors. As punishment, they were shot too. And ever since then, no one wants to be emperor. In other words: everyone wants to be president.

Entry 38

La Chilindrina managed to get Jaimito to lend her his iron. I asked her what she wanted it for, since she never ironed her own clothes—her great-grandmother always did that. But La Chilindrina told me she wanted the iron to iron Serafina, which is the name of Popis's doll. Popis got really angry when she found out what Chilindrina wanted to do with her doll, but Chilindrina told her that was what all the TV actresses had been doing lately: getting Botox. And as an example, she showed us a magazine with photos and articles about many artists who had done the same thing. And the truth is, judging by the photos, you could tell their skin was smoother. In other words: not as wrinkled as it used to be.

La Chilindrina said they did that through surgery, but it was basically the same as ironing your face.

In any case, Popis started to have second thoughts. She said she'd let Chilindrina iron her doll Serafina's face, as long as she ironed her grandmother Doña Nieves's face first—whose skin is more wrinkled than an old turtle's. But Doña Nieves said there was no way in the world she'd let that happen. So Popis still doubted that it was possible to do that—to improve people's faces with the doctors' surgeries; although in the magazine photos you could see that there were also many different noses—but different from the ones each person had had before, since the new ones were all exactly the same.

There were also eyelids that no longer looked like broken umbrellas, and double chins that no longer looked like underinflated balloons.

But Chilindrina told Popis that you can improve not only people's faces, but also their bodies. Then Popis said to her:

"So what are you waiting for? Go get that extra half-meter of height you need!"

The good thing was that Popis ducked when Chilindrina threw the iron at her head.

Speaking of life-changing events, I remembered that Ñoño once told us he has cousins who are twins—that is, they were born on the same day—and they look very much alike—especially one of them; the other not so much.

What happened was that the other one was born with kidneys that didn't develop properly—they hadn't noticed before because the kidneys are inside the body.But then they remembered that his twin brother looked very much like him, and so he could donate one of his kidneys to him, since each person has two kidneys. And that's exactly what they did.

To be honest, I couldn't imagine how one person could walk around with another person's body part. Because you can't exactly say:

"Here, I'll leave my nose with you; I'll come back for it in a little while."

But Ñoño told us that the doctors were the ones who took care of that, and that the same thing could be done with lungs, hearts, livers, gizzards, nanita (pig uterus), nenepil (organ meat), and so on and so forth.

Then we had a good laugh imagining what Ron Damon would look like if Quico gave him his skinny pig cheeks.

Or Popis with Jaimito the Postman's mustache.

Or me with Maestro Longaniza's legs.

Or Chilindrina with Ñoño's buttocks.

Entry 39

This morning I ran an errand for Doña Clotilde, and as a thank-you she gave me a torta de jamón. But just as I was about to eat it, Quico came along and swatted the torta out of my hand, telling me that there must be something wrong with it, since Doña Clotilde—who's a witch—had made it. But then I remembered something Ñoño had once said: that it hadn't been fully proven yet that Doña Clotilde was a witch. So I picked up the torta to eat. However, this made Quico go crazy, and he swatted the torta away from me again. So I wanted to grab Quico and smash his face in, but I didn't, because the most urgent thing was to pick up the torta and eat it.

The problem was that the Witch of '71 noticed and told me I shouldn't have picked the torta up off the floor because the devil had already kissed it. But I didn't see any devil around, so I picked up the torta to keep eating. And then Quico came back and knocked it right out of my hands again with another swat. So I figured the best thing to do was to beat the crap out of Quico first and then pick up the cake.

But Quico ran off again, and in the process, he stomped on the torta. So now I really had no choice but to grab Quico and give him a good smack on his skinny pig cheeks.

But Jaimito the Mailman told me that was an act of revenge. He also said that *"revenge is never good; it kills the soul and poisons it."*

And I think Jaimito was right about what he said, but I also think he could have waited to tell me until after he'd already spilled the beans to Quico.

Entry 40

At school, they already explained to us the difference between a monarchy and a republic: in a monarchy, the king is in charge, and in a republic, the president is in charge. For someone to become king, they are chosen by their father, who is the previous king. On the other hand, for someone to become president, they are chosen by the previous president.

Our country is not a kingdom, but a republic. That is why we should not say, for example, that a tree belongs to the plant kingdom and a stone to the mineral kingdom. What we should say is that the tree belongs to the plant republic and the stone to the mineral republic.

For the same reason, one should not say that disorder reigned in a place, but rather that disorder presided there. And the lion is not the king of the jungle, but the president of the jungle. Therefore, when we pray, we should say: “Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy Name; thy Republic come unto us…” and so on.

Entry 41

Yesterday, Jaimito the Mailman didn't leave the house at all. La Chilindrina and I thought he might be sick, because the same thing had happened before; so we decided it would be best to go up and check on him. But the last time, we had a really hard time getting into his house because the door was locked from the inside. And Jaimito didn't answer, no matter how much we knocked on the door and called out to him. But what happened that time was that poor Jaimito was so weak he didn't even have the strength to slide the bolt on the door.

That’s why, when he finally felt relieved, Jaimito decided it would be best not to have a lock on his front door. And he was right, because door locks are only meant to keep thieves out—but what thief would want to break into a house where there’s nothing to steal? There used to be something they could steal: Jaimito's bike. But it's been about four weeks since Jaimito sold his bike—he needed the money to buy medicine.

The problem is that it seems the medications haven't been all that effective.

Entry 42

Professor Jirafales told us that history began to be written thousands of years ago. I mean, that’s plenty of time for them to have finished writing it by now, right? Because, at this rate, they'll never finish.

Then he wrote something on the board and told us to copy it down. Here's what I copied:

“We must study history without fostering feelings of hatred or a spirit of vengeance. Not to make things worse, but to make them better. In a word: with love.”

And since we didn't quite understand what he meant, he went on to explain that there are books and teachers whose history lessons are designed to teach us to hate our fellow human beings. For example: the Spanish, for conquering us; the Americans, for taking half our territory; the French, for imposing an emperor on us who wasn't from around here; and so on and so forth.

But that's really wrong. We shouldn't hate anyone.

And we certainly shouldn't hate someone for the wrongs committed by their ancestors.

For example: we know that among the Spaniards who conquered us, there were all kinds of people: bad, average, and good. The bad ones took all the gold and silver they

could get their hands on, and they also mistreated the indigenous people, who had to flee by hiding in the virgin forest—which, by the way, the teacher explained to us is called a "virgin forest" because humans had never set foot in it. In other words: after the Spanish arrived, the forest was no longer virgin. But the good ones, on the other hand, defended the Indians and taught them useful skills. The best were the missionaries, who also taught the Indians what they had to do to keep their souls clean—the Indians, for their part, taught the Spaniards what they had to do to keep their bodies clean. But even if we were to consider only the bad ones, the Spaniards of today are no longer the same as those who conquered us. Therefore, we must not hate someone for what their ancestors did.

In other words: it'd be like if Quico hated himself just because his ancestors made him look ugly.

Then Professor Jirafales told us that we shouldn't hate the Americans—who are basically the gringos—for taking half of our territory. —Which, by the way, Ron Damón says was the best part, meaning where the roads are better and all that.

Because the teacher says it wasn't just their fault, but also the fault of many Mexicans who preferred to fight among themselves rather than defend themselves against those others. And that's not right, because if thieves break into your house, it's more important to defend yourself against the thieves than to fight with your brothers.

And anyway, I don't think those gringos are the same as they are today.

In other words: all we can do now is pray to God that the current ones aren't worse than the ones before.

Then the teacher told us about the emperor the French had imposed on us: his name was Maximilian, but the funny thing is that he wasn't French—he was Australian. And it is known that he was born in an ambulance, well, he was part of the Absurdos family.

Then Godínez said that, on the contrary, the one who had actually been French was Pancho Villa, but the teacher asked him how he could possibly say that Pancho Villa was French, and Godínez replied that his name was Francesco Villa.

Then Chilindrina asked, “If Maximilian wasn’t French, why did they say it was a French invasion?” And the teacher replied that the one who sent Maximilian was the Emperor of France, whose name was Napoleon. Then Chilindrina said she knew him, since he had become very famous for being so poor. But the teacher told her no, that Napoleon hadn't been poor, and La Chilindrina said to him:

“Well, I saw that he was already walking with one hand behind his back and the other in front,” she said with a laugh; who knows why.

And Professor Jirafales replied that, first of all, she was talking about Napoleon I—but she wrote it on the blackboard like this: Napoleon I—and he was talking about Napoleon III—and he wrote it like this: Napoleon III.

So I asked him if it wasn't the same man. And the teacher said no, how could the first one be the same as the third? But I thought it was the same person, and that they were just adding lines as he got older.

Then the teacher sighed and asked us to copy down what he had written on the board again. So I copied it down again.

“We must study history without fostering feelings of hatred or a spirit of vengeance. Not to make things worse, but to make them better. In a word: with love.”

GODÍNEZ

Entry 43

This morning I earned a peso that Doña Florinda gave me as a tip for an errand I ran for her. Then Chilindrina came over and advised me to bury the peso in a flowerpot and tell Doña Florinda that someone had stolen it from me. I asked her what I'd gain from that, and Chilindrina told me I'd gain two things: first, Doña Florinda would feel sorry for me when she heard the coin had been stolen, and so she'd give me another peso; second, after planting the peso in the flowerpot, a money tree would grow there that would give me lots of coins every year.

I thought it was a great idea, so I ran off to put my peso in a flowerpot.

Then I went to find Jaimito the Postman to tell him not to worry anymore about how much he was spending on medicine, I could lend him whatever he needed very soon. But Jaimito asked me how I was going to get that money, and when I explained about the coin tree, he told me that couldn't be true, that money doesn't grow on trees like oranges and lemons.

I thought Jaimito was right, since he knows a lot about plants and all that. So I went to dig up my weight from the pot; but then I found that the coin had disappeared. So someone must have stolen it.

That made me really sad, so I started crying and crawled into the barrel. A little while later, Chilindrina came over and asked me why I was crying, and I told her that the coin I'd buried in the flowerpot had been stolen. Then Chilindrina said to me:

"That's it, Chavito! You're doing great. When Doña Florinda sees you crying so sincerely, she'll surely believe that story about how your coin was stolen."

But I told her that was exactly what had happened: that someone had stolen my coin. But that idiot didn't get it and kept insisting:

"That's it, Chavo, you're such a great actor!"

That really made me angry. So I told her not to be so stupid, that I wasn't acting—I was telling the truth—but it was no use, because Chilindrina still didn't get it.

We were discussing this when Professor Jirafales came in and asked us what was going on. I explained everything to him, but by the time I finished, I realized that Chilindrina wasn't there anymore, so she couldn't confirm to the professor what I was telling him. Then Professor Jirafales gave me a coin that looked exactly like the one I'd had before, and told me he wanted to find Chilindrina to talk to her.

Last night, Chilindrina told me she'd found a very naughty boy who had stolen the coin I'd buried in the flowerpot. He must have been spying on me when I buried it, and then he went and dug it up and ran off with it. But then Chilindrina caught up with him, beat him up, and got my coin back.

That's why I love her so much.

And that's why we went to the store and split the cost between the two of us—50 cents each.

But Chilindrina told me that what I was doing was an act of charity and that people shouldn't go around telling others about their charitable deeds, because then all the merit is lost. That's why she told me not to tell Professor Jirafales. And that's why I'm never going to tell him.

Entry 44

For the past few days, Chilindrina has been staying with her great-grandmother instead of with her dad, since Ron Damón is working in another city.

Well, that's what Chilindrina said, but I think only half of what she said is true. I mean, it's true that her dad is somewhere else, but it's not true that he's working. He's probably just looking for a way to make money without having to work. Or maybe they put him in jail.

Chilindrina's great-grandmother is named Doña Nieves. And the name suits her perfectly, because her hair is as white as snow. But not exactly snow-white. I mean, it's not as white as coconut snow, but more like soursop snow. But the kind of soursop that's already gone bad.

The problem is that Chilindrina's great-grandmother turned out to be just as clingy as Ron Damon—she's only been in the neighborhood a few days and has already given me plenty of headaches. And she's also picked up Chilindrina's way of crying. So both of them cry for no reason at all—but when they do, their screams can be heard twenty blocks away. By the way, Chilindrina doesn't know how to pronounce the word "great-grandmother" (bisabuela); she says "biscabuela" instead.

Anyway, I really miss Ron Damon; sure, he was lazy, a liar, and a hothead, but he was also really endearing.

Entry 45

Ñoño came back from vacation and told me he ran into a girl named Patricia Jiménez, who said to say hi to me, but I don't remember who she is.

Entry 46

The best thing of all is Christmas.

People set up nativity scenes and Christmas trees in their homes, decorated with little colored lights that flicker on and off. The lights look like stars. They also decorate the streets and stores. You can hear some very beautiful songs in churches.

This Christmas, I was invited to Doña Florinda's house, and they told me I could eat as much as I wanted. And there they all were: Professor Jirafales, Sr. Barriga, Ñoño, Doña Florinda, Quico, Popis, Chilindrina, Ron Damón, Doña Nieves, Godínez, Jaimito the Postman, and Doña Clotilde—I won't say here that Doña Clotilde is the Witch of '71, because that sounds bad at Christmas time.

At midnight, everyone hugged everyone else. But the one who hugged me the most was Chilindrina. And Doña Florinda hugged Professor Jirafales a lot. And Doña Clotilde really wanted to hug Ron Damón and Jaimito the Postman, but they weren't really in the mood.

At the foot of the tree were lots of packages wrapped in colorful paper. They were gifts that Sr. Barriga had brought for everyone. And there was even one for me! It was a plastic toy car, so much prettier than the ones I make out of cardboard boxes.

But that toy car didn't last me very long, because the next day I gave it to the building superintendent's son. As the superintendent's son is a poor boy.

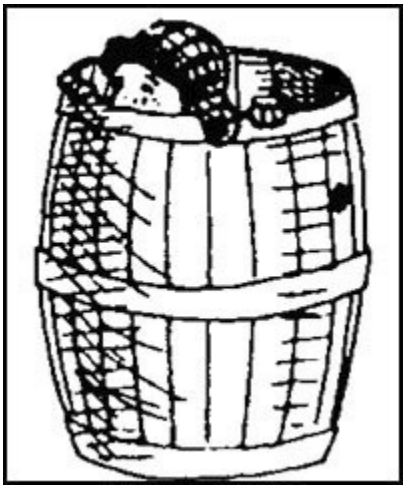
Entry 47

Professor Jirafales told me that every time I breathe, a baby is born somewhere in the world. But there's no way I'm going to stop breathing.

Then he explained to me that what he meant was that there are too many people in this world—men, women, and children—and that the problem is that people are constantly being born. In other words, there will come a time when there won't be enough room for us all, and when that happens, what are those of us who are left over going to do?

Of course, it's the poor who end up being the ones left over, because the rich hardly ever bother to have kids. The thing is, the parents of the rich have other ways of having fun.

Entry 48



Yesterday was just like last time: Jaimito the Mailman didn't leave his house at all. I realized it because I had been waiting for him to come downstairs so he could see that I can now jump from the fifth step of the staircase.

But nothing worked; he just wouldn't come down.

So I went upstairs to see if something was wrong with him. And what was wrong with him was that he was already dead.

His little eyes were closed, as if he were just asleep. And it even looked like he was dreaming something nice, because he had a happy look on his face. But that can't be, because there's no way he would have been happy to die.

Or who knows, because Jaimito the Mailman always said he preferred to avoid getting tired.

Now, he's finally overcome fatigue for good.

Entry 49

Professor Jirafales explained to us that the word “inflation” doesn’t just mean that something is inflated, but also that things are getting more and more expensive.

That’s why Ñoño is a much more expensive kid than I am: because he’s as round as a well-inflated balloon. I, on the other hand, am like a deflated balloon. That’s why I’m a cheap kid.

And I'd like to be an expensive kid, because expensive kids eat really well every day. But there are very few expensive kids; most of us are cheap.

The teacher also told us that it’s very important to know how to save, because those who save always have something set aside when inflation hits.

I remember that, shortly before he died, Jaimito the Postman told me that saving is the same as storing. And that the same goes for memory, because people store the things they remember in their memory. In other words: if you don't remember something, it's because you haven't stored it in your memory.

That means saving is a good thing. But not always—only when you save good things. For example, it's not a good idea to save trash; it's better to throw it away in a trash can. On the other hand, it is a good idea to save a little money, just in case inflation hits.

And the same goes for the things you remember. For example: if you get into a fight with another kid, never try to hold onto that memory, because if you remember it, you'll suffer all over again.

And the other way around: if something nice happens to you, then it really is better to think about it every now and then, because each time you do, you feel happy all over again.

And happiness is when you're content.

So, it's best to keep only the good memories in your mind.

Just in case there happens to be an “inflation of happiness.”

Epilogue

by Roberto Gómez Bolaños

The above is written on the last page of the notebook.

This concludes what we decided to publish under the title “Diario del Chavo del Ocho.” But it is not—nor should it be—an ending, since, with obvious exceptions, diaries are distinguished precisely by that: by having no ending. And the exceptions are usually sad. As sad, for example, as the ending implied by the very fact that a diary announces it is coming to an end…

Fortunately, however, this is not the case with *El Chavo del Ocho*. The diary comes to an end because the notebook had no more pages to offer the budding author; but it is clear that life goes on. The daily act of writing may end, but daily life continues; the diary accumulates experiences that could later be recounted in another notebook—or perhaps in another book? But that life that continues—what is it like now? How does it unfold?

I tried to find out. I went back to the park many times; I searched diligently; I looked around; I asked questions; I sat on the same bench where I had been when Chavo del Ocho polished my shoes—the very spot where he had left his notebook behind. But it was all in vain.

And there is only one option left: that you receive a copy of this book and, if you see fit, contact me.

If that were to happen, don't think, Chavo, that I would take advantage of our potential friendship.

I just want to thank you. Thank you so much for everything that incomparable character, El Chavo del Ocho, has given me.

Historical

by Florinda Meza

The streets of Bogotá are packed with a crowd numbering, according to official estimates by the Colombian government, over three million people. Inevitably, there is pushing and shoving, people fainting, hysterical outbursts, and so on. All of this is the result of the uncontrollable desire to get a close look at the idol—or to touch him, if possible.

But who is this prominent figure causing all this? A national hero? A world champion in a sport? The Holy Father?

No. In this case, the character is just a poor child.

That's a lie!… He's just an adult dressed up as a poor kid, and everyone knows it. But who cares! Either way, he 's “EL CHAVO DEL OCHO.”

One could consult experts in the psychology of the masses, and even then it would be difficult to find an explanation for the phenomenon. Therefore, it would be best to stick to presenting the facts:

It all began one day in March 1972, when Mexican writer and actor Roberto Gómez Bolaños—better known as “Chespirito”—premiered on television the first episode of the series that would go on to touch an entire continent and much of the rest of the world. In the broadcast, the actor—who had long since reached adulthood—appears dressed as a poor child: worn-out shoes that are too big for him; threadbare, patched, and mended pants; a T-shirt in the same condition; two strips of cloth serving as the most rudimentary suspenders; and, above all, a cap with earflaps that would be the defining feature of his outfit.

He lacks so much that he doesn't even seem to have a real name. But even that isn't necessary, since his nickname, “El Chavo del Ocho,” will be heard and repeated weekly by more than 300 million viewers—and the number keeps growing. It is said—eventually—that he lives in apartment number 8 of an old but clean neighborhood, hence the nickname. But no one has ever seen said apartment. Countless times, however, he has been seen taking refuge in a barrel in the neighborhood courtyard, which has led quite a few people to claim that this is where the popular Chavo lives, even though he has repeatedly clarified that the barrel is only what we mentioned a few lines ago: a refuge, that special little corner that all children have, and in which they often hide to cry, to dream, etc.

No one knows who his parents were, when he arrived, or where he came from. What is known, however, is that he has no toys. And that he almost never eats breakfast. Nevertheless, the character often shows signs of optimism. Perhaps because deep down he knows, as his creator has said, that he possesses the most precious of gifts: life.

The series aims to amuse and entertain, and it succeeds in doing so more effectively than any other program ever aired on television on the continent—including U.S. television. But it doesn't always achieve this by making the audience burst out laughing; on many occasions, it is tenderness that serves as the main source of amusement.

And isn't that very tenderness the foundation and explanation for the incredible phenomenon that is *El Chavo del Ocho*? After all, he isn't even the “funniest” of the characters in the show's wonderful cast; in that regard, Don Ramón, La Chilindrina, and Quico really stand out.

Thus,

Tenderness.

However, El Chavo del Ocho has another characteristic that sets him apart from every other adult who has ever played a child—whether on television, in film, on the radio, in theater, or in any other similar medium: El Chavo is not the mischievous child, nor the clever child, nor the overly silly child, nor the handsome child, nor even the overly ugly child; no, El Chavo del Ocho is simply the sweetest.

But whether this is due to the boundless tenderness it inspires, how much fun and entertainment it provides, or any other reason, the impact is enormous.

When his arrival in Santiago de Chile is announced, the public's excitement leads to speculation that students will go to the airport to welcome him instead of attending classes. And the authorities at the Ministry of Education prevent this from constituting an absence… by granting a general holiday and stating that the reason is solely this: to give people the opportunity to go and welcome their idol. He then parades in the company of his popular group, overwhelmed by a crowd that stretches from the distant airport all the way to the very door of the hotel where he will be staying.

In another city in the Republic of Chile, Valparaíso, the crowd stands for hours at the foot of the hotel, delighted simply by the fact that El Chavo or his bandmates step out to wave hello. What's more, that same crowd spontaneously breaks into a rendition of "Qué Bonita Vecindad," the group's theme song.

Subsequently, these live performances not only reaffirmed El Chavo's popularity but also set records that have yet to be matched. For example: two shows on the same day—one in the morning and another in the afternoon—at the National Stadium in Santiago, Chile, which has a capacity of 80,000 and was filled to capacity for both shows, or the performance on the famous stage at Quinta Vergara, where the renowned Viña del Mar Song Festivals are held, a venue where El Chavo and his group broke all attendance records, forcing a large portion of the audience to "set up" in the hills surrounding the venue.

CARACAS, VENEZUELA

The racetrack employees head to work along the same route and at the same time as always. But they hadn't taken into account that, along the same route and at the same time, thousands of drivers are heading to a venue near the racetrack: the excellent auditorium called El Poliedro, where El Chavo and his band are performing. Result: the traffic jam prevents the racetrack employees from arriving at work on time. As a result, the first three races take place without ticket clerks to take bets, causing the company to lose roughly three million bolivars.

BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

"They're crazy," someone remarks. "Luna Park only fills up when there's a Monzón fight—Carlos Monzón, the most popular boxer Argentina has ever had. How is it possible, then, that this Mexican group is planning to put on five consecutive shows there?"

But they were saying all this to the promoter who had hired El Chavo, who knew exactly what he was doing, since the show packed the huge and popular auditorium —Luna Park—not only during the five scheduled performances, but also during the two additional ones that had to be added—and even then so many people were left outside the auditorium, unable to enter due to lack of space, that more extra performances could have been organized had it not been for the commitment to perform in other cities such as Córdoba, Rosario, Mar del Plata, Mendoza, Tucumán, Santiago del Estero, etc., where the venues were also filled to capacity.

Here it's worth taking a leap forward in time to return to the same place nine years later. How many "booms" repeat themselves after nine long years? This one! Yes, because the group returns to the same venue, booked this time for seven shows, and not only do they once again fill the stands at Luna Park to capacity, but they also have to add two more shows to the schedule, setting the unbeatable record of nine consecutive days.

On this occasion, right there in Buenos Aires, a man approached him wanting to take a photo with El Chavo, claiming that "in a couple of years, that photo would take pride of place in the Casa Rosada, the official residence of the Argentine government." This man's name was Carlos Menem.

LIMA, PERÚ

"People even came to the airport on tricycles to welcome Chavo del Ocho." That's how the news article described the arrival of the popular character. But the crowd didn't just arrive however they could; they also tore down the fence surrounding the runway area and stormed the runways, forcing airport security to intervene and evacuate the Mexican actors in ambulances that had come to their aid. Air traffic was delayed by two hours, the time it took the military to clear—without any violence, of course—the more than 50,000 people who had invaded the runway.

PANAMÁ, PANAMÁ

After filling every venue where they performed, El Chavo and his group were invited to the private residence of Mr. Demetrio Lacas, President of the Republic. The gathering was attended by members of the Cabinet, the Governor of the Province of Panama, and a host of other dignitaries.

SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

The mayor presents the keys to the city to Chavo del Ocho. There isn't a corner of the island where he isn't known. The audience packs to capacity wherever he performs, whether in San Juan itself or in Ponce, Mayagüez, Arecibo, Aguadilla, Bayamón, etc.

NEW YORK, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Madison Square Garden, a prestigious venue reserved exclusively for the biggest stars in the entertainment world. And of course: one of these luminaries is El Chavo, who manages to fill the venue to its maximum capacity with an audience that never stops laughing or applauding throughout the entire performance. When it's over, a black police officer approaches El Chavo and says, "I don't know a damn word of Spanish… but you are wonderful!" And he shakes his hand warmly.

SAN PEDRO SULA, HONDURAS

El Chavo and his group are unable to check into the hotel where they had made a reservation because, upon learning of their arrival, a crowd swarmed the area within a three-block radius of the hotel. As a result, they are forced to stay at a secret location.

GUATEMALA, EL SALVADOR, NICARAGUA, COSTA RICA

Ideologies may differ, but the public's enthusiasm is focused on a single figure: El Chavo. And while there may be problems in the region, none are big enough to prevent every venue from being packed to capacity when El Chavo and his band take the stage.

And history repeats itself in Ecuador, Uruguay, and Paraguay; but it is not only the venues packed with people that bear witness to this popular fervor. No, the phenomenon takes on sociological dimensions when, for example, the president of the Republic of Colombia hosts a reception for Chavo at the Government House itself, where both he and his ministers remove their ties to give the gathering a more cordial atmosphere.

And then, the characteristic phrases:

The Buenos Aires taxi driver: "It's nothing; I can't charge someone who has brought so much joy to my home."

The lady from Viña del Mar: "Please accept this house as a gift. It's the only way I can repay you for the joy you bring to my grandchildren."

The Guatemalan diplomat: "You are the finest ambassadors that Mexico—or any other country—has ever sent to this part of the world."

The Costa Rican politician: "If you, Chavo, were to run for president of this country, you'd win with 99 percent of the vote."

The boy from San Juan: "Here, Chavo: I only have two dollars, but I'm giving them to you so you can buy some shoes."

The boy from El Salvador—while in Mexico City—said, "I hitchhiked all the way from my country to yours just to say hi to you in person, Chavo."

Children, teenagers, the elderly, men and women from across the continent: “Thank you; God bless you; thank you… thank you… thank you…”

An Ecuadorian schoolteacher: “I tell my students not to miss *El Chavo*. It’s more educational than many textbooks.”

The boy who sells trinkets to bus passengers in Guatabita, Colombia: “Look, Chavo: here you go”—and he shows off a roughly carved wooden Chavo that he’s wearing around his neck. Then: “Here, Chavo; this is a gift for you”—the very merchandise he was selling.

Later, El Chavo took Brazil by storm—dubbed into Portuguese, of course—and it didn't take long for the show's ratings to surpass those of Xuxa herself, the unrivaled local idol.

It then crossed the ocean. But it didn't stop in Spain, where it was an immediate smash hit, but continued on to many other countries. And thanks to timely dubbing, viewers could hear El Chavo speaking in Italian, Russian, Chinese, Hindi, and so on.

And someday history will have to record everything about this phenomenon. In the meantime, I am left with the satisfaction of having been part of this unparalleled feat, to which I bear witness with this account.